

MY APPRENTICESHIP TO CRIME

An  
(To the memory of my  
Autobiography

Grace Maria Treadwell.

-by-

ARTHUR HARDING

the birth-rate was very high. I knew many parents who were  
 the home. The clothes were sold in jumble sales held in the church hall.  
 Unlike most jumble sales the clothes and other goods which were  
 sent to the church were very good, some of the clothes were new,  
 just shop soiled; CHAPTER 29.

### The Daily Telegraph Appeals.

My mother had been a very good church-goer; if there was  
 anything before the end of 1942, it had become necessary to bring  
 to the notice of the proper authority the scandal of the begging  
 appeals in aid of the aged poor of Bethnal Green. the hovels  
 of it. For some years the Daily Telegraph had carried advertisements  
 or rather begging appeals, inserted by the Vicar of St. Paul's,  
 Virginia Road, Bethnal Green. Very expensive appeals running  
 to some twenty lines at so many shillings a line, so the  
 results must have justified the expenditure. the War. But  
 the We who lived in Gibraltar Gardens were parishioners of the  
 Vicar of St. Paul's, so it was natural we should be interested  
 in the Vicar's activities. The appeals in the Daily Telegraph  
 were for funds and clothes to help the aged poor and destitute  
 of which the parish of St. Paul's had its share. parishioners  
 was Mr. Before the War the appeals for help were generously  
 responded to by the charitable public, money and clothing poured  
 into the church and the Vicar was able to acquire some property  
 which he turned into a country holiday camp for the children.

In the summer many children had a pleasant holiday at

the birth-rate was very high. I knew many parents who were the home.

The clothes were sold in jumble sales held in the church hall; it was always a mystery to me how her other children unlike most jumble sales the clothes and other goods which were sent to the church were very good, some of the clothes were new, just shop soiled; these goods were from big stores and shops, the conditions which existed in her home were bad even for Bethnal Green. This is the lady whom the Vicar would bring his visitors to see; they would climb the dirty stairs to enter a small room about 10ft. x 9 ft. No gas, no electric light, only a cheap paraffin lamp hanging on the wall. The Vicar would often bring his slum visitors to see the hovels of his parish and to see the conditions under which they lived all their lives, having children in large numbers, this was a luxury which the rich seldom enjoyed.

The local council had decided to condemn Gibraltar Buildings and Gibraltar Gardens long before the War. But where the coal was kept in the bottom part and the food in the top part of the cupboard, built a large brick shelter for the people to sleep in, When War was declared. So I propose to show the readers what the These washing and toilet facilities were common to the four families living on that floor of the house.

One of the most faithful and loyal of his parishioners was Mrs. B. This woman had suffered a great deal of sorrow in her life, she was some sixty winters old and believe me, her life had been all winter, having lost husband and children from the ravages of T.B. The strange thing about T.B. families,

The other three rooms on this floor were occupied by the families of Mrs. B.'s two daughters, who were married and had children. They lived on the communal system, shared equally was the food and other necessities. Life held no problems for

the birth-rate was very high. I knew many parents who were infected with T.B. Most had large families. In regard to Mrs. B, it was always a mystery to me how her other children survived to reach a normal span.

This lady had lived in these buildings for many years and the conditions which existed in her home were bad even for Bethnal Green. This is the lady whom the Vicar would bring his visitors to see; they would climb the dirty stairs to enter a small room about 10ft. x 9 ft. No gas, no electric light, only a cheap paraffin lamp hanging on the wall. The room was furnished with an old iron bedstead, straw mattress and blankets that were once clean.

The other coverings for the bed in winter would consist of old coats, etc. The small fire-grate was the only means of cooking a meal, aside of the fire stove was a cupboard where the coal was kept in the bottom part and the food in the top part of the cupboard.

On the landing would be a sink and water tap, also a toilet. These washing and toilet facilities were common to the four families living on that floor of the house.

The other three rooms on this floor were occupied by the families of Mrs. B.'s two daughters, who were married and had children. They lived on the communal system, shared equally was the food and other necessities. Life held no problems for

Mrs. B. Her waking hours were spent in the comfort of the local pub, first in the morning session where she would sit with her apron full of vegetables, meat, and day-to-day needs. One of her married daughters would take the day's rations from her and return to cook on the small stove the meal for dinner. Her married sons-in-law were two docile persons who had been sufficiently tamed to accept the conditions of life with Mrs. B. The children went to Sunday School and the married daughter went to the Mothers Meeting on Monday. Mrs. B. always attended church on Sunday morning, where the Vicar always had a good congregation.

The children of the Court or Gardens had to attend the services of the church because of the holiday camps, only those who attended the church services were recipients of any church benefits and gifts. At Christmas, the Vicar would distribute his gifts to all those who attended his services. The money gifts ranged from one pound to as much as five pounds for his special parishioners who helped in his services. The death rate among the children of Gibraltar Gardens was high, also among the mothers. I remember one of Mrs. B.'s daughters attempting to limit her family increase by attempting abortion; she died a very painful death because of her ignorance and poverty.

On the bottom floor lived a family who did not care for religion or the Vicar's gifts. The family consisted of man and wife, with two children. The man was a labourer always unemployed, a follower of Sir Oswald Mosley; he never missed a meeting or a march. All he knew about politics was the Fascists were against the Jews and the "Reds".

The wife was a very small, frail sort of a woman, looked half-starved; she earned a few shillings cleaning or char-ing. Like her husband, she could drink her share of beer; her two children, a boy and girl, were far superior in intelligence than their parents.

The girl was a picture of English beauty, very charming, with a talent for singing. The boy followed his father's political ideals and became a fervent believer in Fascism. His political beliefs were of no substance, but his talent for drawing and other artistic gifts would have marked him out for distinction. The family lived in the one room - how they were able to eat, sleep and move in the small room is something one can only guess at. It must be remembered that the early years of my childhood were lived under the same conditions.

The daughter married a fine young man who took her out of London to a fine house in the country. During the war, the family left London for the country, where they were provided

with a nice council house, so fortune smiled on the family who had tasted the bad times of unemployment, want and bad conditions in Gibraltar Buildings.

The top floor contained four rooms, each let to a different family. The first of these rooms was occupied by an old ex-convict who had turned straight in his old age. He obtained a living by being a "totter", which is a rag and bone man. He took a barrow round the streets collecting old lumber, anything he could sell. He lived with a lady who had been one of the brightest of London's ladies or the town. Time had ravaged her charms and her life had left its story on her face.

She too had decided to live a quieter life and get herself a permanent husband and home for keeps, so you find these two who have ruined the best years of their life trying to forget the past. Both were fond of the pubs, where they spent the best part of the night.

Every night they would sing their way home to the Buildings, every night we would hear, "I love you, Nellie Dean" would be the song, as they staggered down the Gardens. After about half an hour, they would begin fighting. Screams, bad language, then all quiet.

One could picture these two drunken animals in their den. Blessed by nature with health and strength, abusing all the



laws of hygiene. They carried on through the war. Air Raids had no meaning for them, they drank themselves insensible every night. He went down with pneumonia in the winter of 1942, and that was the end of the road. She is still to be seen around the Spitalfields area nightly. No hope, she strangely enough, being a Catholic, sometimes sees a priest to say a Mass for her late husband, as if a few minutes repentance can pay for a lifetime of sin.

Another room on this floor was rented by an old blind lady. She was a very nice person getting on in years; she was drawing a blind pension, also an old age pension of some ten shillings weekly. From her small pension she paid a shilling weekly towards a Christmas club. This dear old lady had a daughter who would sometimes visit her. She belonged to the West End and had the reputation of being a tough customer, but whatever life she led, she never missed visiting her mother and giving her a few shillings.

The blind lady was on the Vicar's visiting list for gifts and was one of the show places for visitors. The remarkable thing about the Gardens was the fact that although the children very often went hungry, and I have seen the little ones run up and down the Court in bare feet in winter, and in one house the rats ran over the floor and table, two of these boys gained great prizes and honours as very famous boxers. They were very



fine specimens of physical fitness. family of five - husband, wife and three children. In the middle tenement lived a family of man, woman and two children. The woman aged about thirty years, the man a few years older; he earned a living selling flowers in the market place. The woman was a good-looker after the gypsy fashion. My guess was that they belonged to some gypsy tribe who had expelled them from their community. worst women in the East End.

Some time about 1912 the man and the woman were brother and sister. The woman kept home for him and looked after his two children; they had committed the terrible sin of incest. The man had suffered a term of imprisonment for the offence and they had found Gibraltar Gardens an ideal place for concealing their shame.

For the people who lived in the buildings nearly all had some reason to shun and avoid the police. "None your own business" and "it is nothing to do with you" were sayings which appealed to the neighbours. in the only bed, while the children

slept. In this particular case, the C.I.D. at Commercial Street knew about the brother and sister, but after many attempts to get sufficient evidence which would convict, had found it very difficult to break up the association. It is no offence to associate together. The two children seemed to be retarded mentally and attended special schools. This was life in its most sordid and degrading aspect. The permissive society have not yet reached the sin of incest. All in good time.

On the same landing lived a family of five - husband, wife and three children in one small back room; he was a hawker, not a very good one. I knew his mother and father. Not very nice people, the father had been a boxer of some repute, but his character was that of a bully and liberty-taker. The woman he lived with and was the mother of the man who lived in the Buildings, was one of the worst women in the East End. Some time about 1912 she received a long sentence of penal servitude for a serious offence.

A.L. was the son who had grown up was aged about thirty-five; he married a girl from the Highway and with his three children had drifted to Gibraltar Buildings. He was like his father in physical appearance and his way of life.

He ate in coffee shops and his family lived on half-a-crown a day. He spent his nights in the local pubs and only went home to sleep with his wife in the only bed, while the children slept on the floor. When the 1939 War was declared he deserted his family and sheltered in the rubble shelter where he died from pneumonia some time in 1940. After his death the family prospered and the son became a famous boxer, the other children also making happy marriages.

These are only a few of the people who lived in the Gibraltar Buildings; these are some of the people whom the Vicar of St. Paul's, Virginia Road, had for his flock. There

were many more families living like animals through poverty; they were herded together like sheep; hope had long since abandoned them to misery of their existence.

Who was to blame? The State who regarded unemployment as a deterrent to strikers and high wages? What had the State done to help the unemployed? All these clever people could think of was the dole, fifty weeks on the dole, two weeks on the roads for proper wages, which were more but welcome.

In the blitz of 1940, the Church of St. Paul's, Virginia Road, was bombed and practically destroyed. By a strange chance, the Vicar's house was saved, so the Vicar was able to carry on the good work of collecting funds and selling clothes at the sales. The question I asked myself was: were the aged poor, the little children and the destitute receiving the clothing and other goods which had been sent for them?

I attended the sales and what I saw was a horde of women wardrobe dealers from north London and other districts buying the goods which had been sent for the people of the parish of St. Paul's, Virginia Road.

After several visits to the sales, I was sure that things were wrong. I never saw the Vicar present at any time. What I discovered was that certain dealers had a preview of the goods. This led the other dealers to object, so eventually it was stopped, but the local people were unable to obtain any bargains, only the unsaleable goods.

The Vicar had taken a young woman as his housekeeper. This lady took charge of the distribution or sales of the goods sent to the church. As I have already stated, those who had a preview of the clothes were able to collect the most valuable goods before the public had a chance to buy anything, only the housekeeper being present.

During the 1940 blitz, on the East End, when the Church of St. Paul's was destroyed, on the same night a large bomb dropped on the public air shelter just a few yards away from the church. The death roll was very heavy, the casualties were mostly local people. It was such a serious incident that the Prime Minister visited the scene on the following morning, and his mere presence cheered the people very much.

So at this period of national stress, when the attention of all Britain was fixed on London and the East End, the hearts of people of Britain were grieving for the courageous folk in the East End. At this time, people were reading the appeals in the Daily Telegraph for funds and clothes to help the people who had lost everything, generous readers of the newspaper sending large donations of gifts and money to the Vicar in answer to these appeals for help. Did the people of East London receive those gifts? No. These gifts were sold to dealers from other districts.

Knowing these facts, after careful consideration, I

communicated with the editor of the Daily Telegraph and asked him to investigate the matter. Promptly an agent from the newspaper arrived to conduct inquiries; the result of the inquiries being that the Daily Telegraph put the matter in the hands of Scotland Yard for investigation. It appeared that my allegation against the disposal of the girts by the Vicar was found to have some substance.

The Daily Telegraph refused to publish any more appeals from the Vicar. After some time, a certain inspector from Scotland Yard came to see me and told me the investigation had begun into the case.

The result was the end of the appeals. The vicar had to hand over all the funds that had been received, also the piles of clothing had to be handed over to the local council for distribution among the homeless families. A large sum of money was handed over to the Lord Mayor's Air Raid Fund, which the vicar had banked.

1943. My eldest son was now in the forces, R.A.M.C. All the children were now at school, except the youngest boy.

On the Home Front the war was quiet. Russia was slowly swallowing the German Wehrmacht, so the enemy had no time to spare or planes to risk on Britain. We were enjoying comparative peace except for the Navy and Mercantile Marine.

1944. One morning in January we had a V.2 drop quite close

hurried home to find the house had been damaged and needed to the house. Fortunately I had all the windows of the dining first aid repairs again. I looked at my wife and children, room covered and protected by very heavy carpets against blast. they were scared, out of their wits and looked worn out, so The children were just getting ready for school. The blast I decided we had had enough of the fireworks. We packed our from the V.2 was very powerful. The windows were all blown in, bags with clothes and other needs and went to Paddington the roof was partially blown off and the house was badly damaged. Station, where we caught a train to Newquay in Cornwall. The blast had blown the fire over the room.

I could not allow my wife and children to submit to constant Soon the services were on the scene. The fire was soon strain and bombardment by the V.1 and V.2 bombs. I myself extinguished, one child being taken to hospital to have her was in such a nervous condition that any little noise would injuries attended to. Soon the First Aid men were on the job; disturb me, so I considered the rest and holiday in Cornwall the roof was covered with a tarpaulin cover and the house would be of great benefit to all of us.

quickly patched up, windows covered with blackout material We stayed in Newquay for some time. When the end of the to keep out the rain and wind.

war was drawing near, we returned to London and to our home. The V.1 or Flying Bombs were the real villains for keeping We had a very bad night, the noise of frequent explosions one out of bed. When on fire watch, it was quite easy to throughout the night made the night most terrifying. follow one of the flying bombs with the naked eye. The days

The next morning after our return the last of the V.2 and weeks passed and the constant explosions began to play rockets dropped on London. This V.2 hit a large L.C.S. block havoc with our nerves.

of flats called Hughes Mansions in Valence Road, Bethnal Green.

We kept the children away from school. I would travel Very extensive damage, great loss of life and many injured. every day to the suburbs, and if I heard the loud explosion

The V.2 dropped at just after 7 a.m. with the result and saw the flash that preceded the rocket, I would hurry that most people were at home. Whole families were wiped out, home to see if the family was safe.

Soon after this disaster the war ended in Europe and peace

One day coming home on a bus, I saw the flash that preceded at long last.

the explosion, then a V.2 exploded quite close. Like others, I

If D-Day had been delayed for another six months, London ran to the scene and the sight made me sick in the stomach. I



hurried home to find the house had been damaged and needed first aid repairs again. I looked at my wife and children, they were scared, out of their wits and looked worn out, so I decided we had had enough of the fireworks. We packed our bags with clothes and other needs and went to Paddington Station, where we caught a train to Newquay in Cornwall.

I could not allow my wife and children to submit to constant strain and bombardment by the V.1 and V.2 bombs. I myself was in such a nervous condition that any little noise would disturb me, so I considered the rest and holiday in Cornwall would be of great benefit to all of us.

We stayed in Newquay for some time. When the end of the war was drawing near, we returned to London and to our home. We had a very bad night, the noise of frequent explosions throughout the night made the night most terrifying.

The next morning after our return the last of the V.2 rockets dropped on London. This V.2 hit a large L.C.C. block of flats called Hughes Mansions in Valence Road, Bethnal Green. Very extensive damage, great loss of life and many injured.

The V.2 dropped at just after 7 a.m. with the result that most people were at home. Whole families were wiped out. Soon after this disaster the war ended in Europe and peace at long last.

If D-Day had been delayed for another six months, London

would have been forced to evacuation. The aerial bombardment by V.1 and V.2 in large numbers would have caused such casualties and destruction to London that normal life could not have been carried on. The D-Day landings were our salvation from continuous V.1-V.2 attacks from which we had no real defence. The war over, we looked forward to our son returning home. He had taken part in the D-Day landings, went through the war in Europe and finished up a casualty. He was sent home to hospital in Scotland and later we were able to get him discharged. We now had two children earning their living, which enabled me to pay for the education of the others. I was still actively carrying on my business as a wardrobe dealer. In the course of my business, I met many wealthy people, especially during the war years. What surprised me most was the fact that these wealthy people were prepared to risk breaking the law for the sake of a few coupons. They were often willing to take part in Black Market deals.

In the poorer parts of the East End it was always possible to buy a book of clothing coupons for three pounds. These books of coupons would be worth a good deal in part-worn clothing. I would exchange clothing coupons for suits, but I never sold them for money although I was often asked to do so.

For myself and family, I was able to supply our clothing

needs from the goods I bought at the door. In the early years of

From my experiences during the war years, I am convinced that most people are honest and law-abiding because it pays to be, not because they are superior and ethically better than other people, but because they have no reason to be otherwise. When new clothes, shoes and other so-called necessities become scarce, these well-to-do people were prepared to break the law and deal in Black Market to get more than their share of the common pool.

If unemployment created crime like it did in the early 1900s, the State was to blame. I have seen what unemployment did to men in the years before the 1914-18 war and after.

For dole, forty-eight weeks and then four weeks on the roads, so the council could pay them a full week's wages. Loafing on street corners all the week, the men reached the stage when they could not work because they did not have the stamina to do a day's work; is it to be wondered at that crime flourished in these years before and after the 1914-18 war?

Crime was always considered to be caused by poverty and unemployment, that was always the reason put forward by the social reformers of all ages. The Webbs and others were convinced that once the State abolished poverty and slums we could cease to have a heavy crime rate, the need for prisons would cease to be a major problem.

The factories are full of employees. The hospitals are full of patients and have waiting lists of cases waiting for treatment. The mental asylums are full, and the jails are full. And we compared to the present time, but the offences committed by criminals in that period were committed to obtain the means of survival, food that they could keep their family and pay the rent of the hovels they lived in.

The poor wretched criminals who filled the prisons in my early years were the product of years of idleness, neglect and semi-starvation. Illiteracy was common among them; these offenders appeared in large numbers before every Assize Court in the country for petty crimes which were punished by savage sentences. Any reader of Charles Dickens must know that these terrible conditions existed in Dickens' time. Dickens described his rogues and villains living in the most deplorable conditions, illiterate, ignorant, born in poor law institutions. His Bill Sykes could be seen in any prison in the country, brutal, ignorant, reared in the slums, no prospects and no hope. It is 200 years since Gibbons wrote *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Some other Gibbon will of a certainty write *"The Decline and Fall of the British Empire"* because that

Today, 1969, we see the opposite conditions than that which existed up to the 1939 war. Then unemployment. Today full employment for all, prosperity for all who wish to avail themselves of the opportunity. The Welfare State has provided for all, not only for the people of Great Britain but for the Commonwealth.

The factories are full of employees. The hospitals are full of patients and have waiting lists of cases waiting for treatment. The mental asylums are full, and the jails are full. And we cannot send convicted prisoners to prison, because there is no vacancies. So we let them off on suspended sentences.

We are turning every available place into a detention home for juvenile delinquents. We have children of 13 and 14 in maternity wards, we have organisations who adopt the babies when they are born to their child mothers. Now Parliament have made abortions legal our children will not have to become mothers and will be given the all clear to engage in prostitution if they wish without any danger.

We have schools where the children are the masters, where there is no discipline, because the teachers are afraid of the parents; if they the teachers are afraid to discipline the children when they break the rules, then they have no right to be teachers.

It is 200 years since Gibbons wrote The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. Some other Gibbon will of a certainty write "The Decline and Fall of the British Empire" because that has already begun. Those of us who have read Gibbons' mighty work will be able to trace the same causes and effects at work in Britain today. Look around: crime, lust, dope, brutality, cruelty, sodomy, it is all there. I am reminded of some lines only last year, in the same area, a man named Ginger Marks

from Byron (?):

The devil he lit on the London pave trace of Ginger Marks  
 And he found his work done well,  
 For its streets ran red with the blood of the dead,  
 And it blushed like the waves of Hell.  
 Loudly and long laughed he, They have here little  
 need of me.

London without doubt is one of the filthiest cities in the  
 world. Every vice and bestiality, sadism of every kind. The  
 ladies enjoy an amount of permissiveness to carry on their  
 professional duties, without any restrictions.

In a crowded club-room in Stepney, the owner was shot dead  
 in front of a number of people. No one was ever convicted for  
 that murder.

Recently a young man returning home along a main road at  
 5 p.m. not a dark night but daylight, in Bethnal Green. Three  
 men jumped from a car and shot him down; he was so badly  
 wounded that he had to have one leg amputated to save his  
 life, his assailants calmly escaped by car. Fear, stark fear,  
 has paralysed everyone.

No arrests were ever made. This daylight attack was as  
 near murder as it is possible to get. For some ten years or  
 more London's underworld has been terrorised by the two twin  
 brothers named Kray. I propose to write the history of these  
 evil men. I had knowledge of them from the day of their birth,  
 having been friendly with their father and his family.

Only last year, in the same area, a man named Ginger Marks



was shot, put in a car and his body disposed of. In spite of a £5,000 reward by the News of the World, no trace of Ginger Marks has ever been discovered. His body is said to have disappeared from a spot not twenty yards from the pub where the Krays

#### CHAPTER 30.

spent a good deal of their time, and which is a short distance from their former home in Valance Road.

The feuds of the old race gangs were child's play compared with the modern gangster. Some years ago, it may be some eighteen years or so ago, the crime reporter of The People introduced to the readers of because the law was corrupt, and the public were scared of The People the at that time unknown King of the Underworld, the political bosses who permitted the law to be corrupt. Once one Billy Hill, the uncrowned King of London's gangsters. the authorities fail to maintain law and order, the gangster Speaking for myself, I had never heard of the man, but on know, then you have crime on the scale we are having today. making a few discreet inquiries I did discover he was a West When the public begin to realise that the law will not And gangster, one of many who infested the Soho district; he protect them or cannot protect them if they interfere or fail was no worse than others of his kind who had collected a few to protect others who are victims of bandits, then the situation convictions for a mixed bag of crimes. arises similar to that which is happening today.

The crime reporter of The People newspaper and Billy Hill Let us look at the part the Sunday newspapers played in had a conference and it was decided that Billy Hill should producing this crime wave. write his life story for the benefit of the paper's readers. So the reporter and Billy Hill created the British Al Capone of modern London.

A large sum of money was paid for this autobiography by The People newspaper to Mr. Billy Hill and the reporter who wrote it. Graphic stories were vividly told of this highly successful gangster, what he did to his rivals and their henchmen. Every