"I WAS IN PRISON"

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BY

F. BROCKLEHURST, B.A. (CANTAB.).

"I was all ear,
And took in sounds that might create a soul
Under the ribs of death." —MILTON.

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Dedicated

TO

MY FRIEND

HUGH V. HERFORD.

PREFACE

THE following account of life in one of Her Majesty's prisons first saw the light of day in the columns of the *Manchester Evening News*, and it is through the kindness of the Proprietors and Editor of that journal that I am able to reproduce it in book form. I have also obtained the permission of the Editor of the *Manchester City News* to quote the extracts from his leading article which preface my own story. From what is stated therein, my readers may form an idea of the reasons which led to my acceptance of imprisonment.

I publish these pages in the hope and

belief that they will do something towards the removal of the evils which I describe. Apart altogether from the general question of Prison Reform, it is nothing short of a disgrace that men who "suffer for conscience sake" should be compelled to undergo the rigours of prison diet and discipline just as though they were the greatest criminals in the land. They ought at the very least to be treated as first-class misdemeanants, allowed to wear their own clothing, read their own books, and pay for their own food.

F. B.

MANCHESTER,
28th June 1898.

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MORE GLIMPSES INTO STRANGEWAYS GAOL.

[*Extracts from a leading article published in the "Manchester City News," 4th June* 1898.]

COMING sharp upon the stinging report of the Manchester Visiting Justices, we have a series of articles in the *Manchester Evening News* from the pen of Councillor Frederick Brocklehurst, B.A. The articles are headed, "I was in Prison." As a fact well remembered, Mr Brocklehurst was charged before Mr Headlam, at the

City Police Court last summer* with the offence of addressing the people on social and labour questions in a secluded part of Boggart Clough. Beyond infringing an arbitrary rule of a City Council Committee he did no manner of harm; he only did what scores of men are permitted to do, unmolested, in Hyde Park any day in the year. Mr Brocklehurst could have purged his offence against the Parks' Committee by paying a fine, but he elected, on principle, and as a protest, to take the alternative of a month in Strangeways Gaol. As the result of this voluntary imprisonment we have the most graphic description of the life of a

* [*Author's Note.*—The exact dates are as follows: Meeting held in the Boggart Hole Clough, 14th June 1896; charged before Mr Headlam on 19th June, and sentenced to £5 and costs, or a month's imprisonment; released from Strangeways, 18th July].

short-time prisoner, guiltless of any crime, which has appeared within our knowledge. The descriptive articles, in admirable literary form, have already reached eight chapters, which suggests that they will be reprinted in book form when concluded. Mr Brocklehurst gives a day-by-day epitome of his life, and of the terrible sameness and monotony of existence in Strangeways Gaol. His story is a heavier indictment against the then Governor and the then Deputy-Governor than even the Visiting Justices' report. It is a picture of hide-bound and unreasoning officialdom in excelsis.

Mr Brocklehurst had committed no crime, as everybody knows, yet he was treated with all the rigour and deprivations of simple comforts which the burglar

had to submit to. The plank bed, three-leg stool to sit on twelve hours a day, oakum picking, dreary silence, no communication with the outside world, and no books. Shakespeare's works, for which he made repeated requests, were refused on the ground that they did not come up to the standard laid down by the rules of the gaol as conveying "moral instruction." He was offered the Bible, Prayer Book, hymns, and two proselytising religious pamphlets, but any other works or papers to relieve the terrible mental hunger after the oakum task had been performed were refused. "We cannot find your request provided for in the rules," was the official reply.

This wooden-headed officialdom reduces the most intellectual inmate to "a dead, unthinking level." He becomes

"a dead man in a dead universe." After a time he is reduced to the level of a wild animal in a menagerie, pacing his cage, merely existing between meal hours. Mr Brocklehurst tells us how he speedily became glad of the oakum picking. It at least found something to do for his fingers, and also some exercise of mind as to the best way to separate the fibres. Moreover, he used some of the oakum for a sort of rude cushion for the small, three-legged stool, to relieve what cyclists call "saddle-sore," but the moment this departure from the senseless rules was discovered, the warder put an end to it.

English people should ask themselves what possible good can society or the nation hope or expect to accrue from such cruel and worse than senseless pro-

ceedings. Who gains or benefits? The community is injured; the prisoner is turned out of gaol worse than he went in. There are many matters in Mr Brocklehurst's remarkable recital which will probably receive Parliamentary notice. He was denied the use of his own underclothing and throat protection, and being subject to throat and chest affections, these deprivations might have had serious effects. He might have died in gaol, and a formal enquiry with closed doors might have been held, and the customary official report sent to the Prison Commissioners to be buried in official pigeon-holes. He was even deprived of his harmless and necessary tooth-brush. His tooth-pick was taken away from him, no doubt on the ground that the prison diet was of so watery a character that

a tooth-pick was a superfluous article. Mr Brocklehurst was not even allowed to pare or clean his finger nails, and he had to bite them as well as he could. For his all-over bath he had two inches of water, "a piece of soap as big as a domino," and neither sponge nor brush.

In another part of our paper to-day, under the title of "Life in Prison," we give another striking account of life in gaol by one who served twelve months in Strangeways and Wakefield Gaols. Our contributor should have never been sent to gaol at all. He was absolutely innocent of the offence for which he was convicted, but he had, as he describes, to go through the maddening process which Mr Brocklehurst depicts.

The series of articles in the *Evening*

News, the article which appears in our columns from "a second-class misdemeanant," and the report of the Manchester Visiting Justices, must be considered as a whole, by the Home Secretary. They constitute a complete and incontestable indictment of the present system of prison government by officially appointed officials, who are protected in every possible way by officialdom in excelsis, known as the Prison Commissioners. The government of our gaols must be taken out of the hands of the Prison Commissioners and be restored to the local authorities under Home Office inspection. Local authorities would be amenable to local public opinion. Those who have suffered hardships and brutalities would have immediate opportunity to state their case, instead of having to wade through the red-taping

of a circumlocution office, whose sole object of existence appears to be to draw their salaries, qualifying for a pension, and screen officials as they expect to be screened themselves.

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CHAPTER I

ADMISSION

THE last words of my friends have been spoken. I still feel the pressure of their hands as we lingered in our last embrace, and I am now in the "Black Maria," bound for Her Majesty's Prison in Strangeways. A political movement has demanded its victims, and I am honoured by its choice. The van rumbles over the stones, almost deafening the ears to sounds outside as well as to voices within. The kind

courtesy of the warder has led him to resign his seat in my favour, and, apart from my fellow-prisoners, I now and then catch the mingled hum of their conversations. A shrill cry from a girl to some one in the men's compartment, "Is that you, Martin?" is followed by a confused jumble of sound, in which the word "Session" figures largely. For a moment silence reigns, and then from side to side is bandied the heartfelt injunction, "Keep your heart up, it's not for ever." A sudden stoppage of the van tells us that a block has taken place in the crowded streets. The horses are whipped up again; a shadow falls upon us; we have passed beneath the barred gate which severs us from friends and the outer world. Now for the first time steals upon us the numbing sense of

imprisonment. We are not free. We are not our own. We are under command, and unquestioning submission is henceforth to be our lot.

We are stripped to the skin, weighed, and measured; our valuables and possessions are catalogued, and the snuff-coloured broad-arrowed garments of a prisoner handed to each of us. The fourth of these operations rarely takes up much time. The sickly pale-faced consumptive undersized youth who preceded me had only three buttons to "declare." I seem to be specially favoured in the matter of prison clothes. My trousers and boots were new, and the attendant did his best to find me a clean cap. A hot bath and a visit to the doctor, by whom I am stethoscoped and otherwise examined, completed the preliminaries. On the score of delicate health

I ask that I may be allowed to wear the underclothing I have brought with me in prison, and am referred to the Governor. My name is called out, and I find myself at the tail-end of a line of criminals who have been gathering from all points of the compass throughout the day. We are now served with bed sheets tied up with a handkerchief. The prison rules are gabbled through in hot haste by a fair-haired youthful warder, the only regulation which sticks in my memory being that we should "Salute the Governor when yer see him." The tone in which these words were flung at us suggested the idea that the person of His Excellency and Mightiness the Governor was like that of the Mikado, seldom seen, and that on such rare occasions we were to receive the vision of glory with "bated

breath and whispering humbleness." The reading of the rules finished, we were marched into the prison proper, where we were allotted to our various warders, and conducted to our cells. A few hurried explanations as to the time of going to bed, getting up, and the general conduct of the prison, and I am left to tramp the tiled floor of my cell in lonely meditation.

CHAPTER II

A CELL AND ITS FURNISHINGS

IMAGINE to yourselves a white-washed cube, 7 feet by 8 by 13, with a barred window of ground glass at one end, and a black-painted iron door at the other, and you can form some idea of the dimensions and appearance of a prison cell. A table stands on the right, and a flat-topped four-legged stool in the centre. In the right-hand corner is a small shelf supporting a slate and pencil, a Bible, Prayer and Hymn Books, and a tract; next come a small brush and comb, a wooden salt-cellar and a piece of soap, while behind stand the

drinking can and the wooden spoon for the "skilly." This last is the only article of cutlery (!) allowed in prison. Beneath this shelf stands your bed-clothing, and, if your crime is great enough for a long sentence, your mattress. On the floor beneath the window are ranged the *papier-mâché* water-can and bowl painted a deep blue; the smallness of the latter recalls my experience of French hotels. With the exception of three printed cards the walls are bare. They hang upon a short wooden peg; an iron nail would mayhap prove dangerous in the hands of a determined criminal. The largest card gives the prison regulations and dietary, the smaller one informs me that if I am desirous of leading a better life when I leave the prison I shall find work at a Church Army Labour

Home, and the third contains a morning and evening prayer.

A pint of meal porridge and a loaf of brown bread are brought to me by the warder, and for the first time I taste prison fare. The bread is good, the porridge excellent, and it is with some regret that I learn from the warder that the porridge is given to prisoners only on admittance, and that I shall never taste it again.

Across from the south-west the rays of the declining sun come slanting through my window. In imagination I glide along the beams to the home I have left behind. I see the old whitewashed country house with its trellis of clematis and roses in bloom. The swallows are flitting to and fro under the high trees which form its emerald setting. The lilac is shedding

its last flowers, and the laburnum, borne down by its gorgeous splendours, is vying with the glory of the setting sun. My old friends, "Rover" and "Spot," the two dogs with which I have rambled many a mile, are silent and expectant, as though awaiting my return. Behind the house the orchard is sweet in its early summer beauty, and the glow of the strawberry begins to peep through its boscage of green. In the paddock beyond, the chesnut "Florrie" waits expectant for the lump of sugar that to-night is so long in coming. Within the house, there is a sense of sudden loss, and I in my cell feel its influences, and regret that I am severed from them, and alone.

A sound disturbs me. It is the rub-a-dub-dub dub-dub-a-dub of my neighbour on the wall. He seems anxious to

open up communication with me, but as I am unable to reply, he soon wearies of the operation. Overhead, I hear the sound of many feet—now regular, now breaking into the sound of horses galloping. The warders have left for the night, and outside in the corridors the watchmen have taken their places. The prison is built on the radial plan; the blocks of buildings from the spokes of the wheel, and at the hub there is a vast dome under which the watchmen are assembled. I can hear the muffled sound of their voices as they converse with one another. Eight o'clock slowly tolls in the clock-tower outside. It is the signal for retiring to rest. I undress, fold my clothes under me as a sort of protection from the hardness of the boards, and attempt to sleep.

My "bed" is simply the metamorphosis of my table. Imagine, if you can, two boards 3 feet by 2½, each supported by four legs, two of which are of unequal length. When these boards are placed end to end they form a continuous slope. Such is the "plank bed." During the day, the lower half is turned round and lifted upon the other in such a way that the foot and the head of the "bed" are immediately over each other. By an arrangement of the heights of the wooden supports the bottom half thus forms the level top of the table. A sloping pillow of wood on which is placed another of straw, two sheets, a blanket, and a piece of Kidderminster carpet, euphemistically called a "rug," complete the furnishing of the prison bed. Short-sentence men never get anything else on which to lie.

If your crime is great enough for a long imprisonment, you are allowed at the end of a month a mattress five nights a week; when two months are concluded you enjoy the mattress an extra night, and at the end of the third month (providing that your conduct has been excellent in the meantime) you may have the felicity of a mattress every night. Children, women, and old men over sixty are excused the plank bed. For those who do experience it, its horrors are indescribable. As I have before said, you fold your clothes underneath (you may not "sleep" in them), and then try to arrange the bed-clothing with a view to the economy of warmth and comfort. You lie on your side, and for the first time in your life realise the pointed boniness of your hips. You turn upon your

stomach, as on a softer spot, and find your knee-caps painfully in the way. Lying on your back with your knees drawn up, you fall in troubled slumber, only to wake with a start to find that the clothes beneath have worked into a lump and worn the skin off your back.* You try position after position, but all in vain; the prison authorities have determined in their inhumanity to verify the words of the prophet: "There is no peace for the wicked." Insensibly, and with some degree of justifiable irritation, you begin to ask: "What connection can there be between a plank bed and moral reform?" and also to discount the statement made by goody-goody fools and philanthropists that prison methods are

*(An actual experience).

not punitive. Too tired and full of pain to sleep, you walk your cell, and are detected in the act by the night-watchman on his rounds. To avoid further pains and penalties you once more lie down upon your "bed," to lie, but not to sleep or rest. The Scriptural words, "I would God it were day," come home to you with new force and meaning, and tired, sleepless, and painfully aching in every limb, you rise in the morning to begin a wearying and monotonous day.

Six o'clock is the signal for the clanging of the prison bell. You don your clothes, perform your ablutions in the aforesaid *papier-mâché* bowl, roll up the bed-clothes, and await the advent of your warder. In a few minutes the door is thrown open, and you place the can

outside for fresh water. The refuse is then carried away, and after another brief interval three pounds of oakum are flung into your cell, and the day's task has begun.

CHAPTER III

A DAY IN PRISON

THESE words conjure up gloomy thoughts, not unaccompanied with pain and regret. Visions of high walls surmounted by *chevaux de frise* assail the mind. Outside, is the forbidding aspect; within, the sense of hopelessness verging to despair. For the ordinary prisoner there is ever before him the blackness of the past and the thought of a ruined future. The recidivist (*i.e.* the confirmed criminal) spends his days in prison with the expectancy, almost the certainty, of a speedy return. Prison life, however, is not all dull drab. For the student

and sympathetic observer, it is relieved by intermittent flashes of colour. The prison system does its best to reduce its victims to a dead unthinking level, to the position of numbered cogs in a mighty Juggernaut wheel, but ever and anon the human element peeps out, and you feel that your prisoner is a man.

It is, however, only in indirect ways that this is recognised. For all practical purposes a prisoner might be a wooden dummy, with a machine capacity for consuming so much food, and picking a certain weight of oakum per day. When his door is locked upon his work, save when he is called to chapel or to exercise, he is left to himself the live-long day. At 7.30, 12, and 6 o'clock the bell rings to mark the meal hours. At such times the occupant of each cell stands

to the right hand of his door in order to receive his food as it is thrust with haste into his outstretched hands. At 8.30 A.M. the bell rings again, this time for chapel, and in company with some seven hundred other prisoners he marches swiftly in single file to the building set apart for worship. While at prayers warders watch him from all sides. A hymn, the shortened liturgy, and the benediction, dismiss him once more to solitude. At 9.30 the bell signals the time for exercise, and together with the men in his block he is marched to the yard outside. Here are three concentric circles formed by flags in the black concrete. He chooses his own ring. That on the outside is usually selected by the young and strong, the others by the feeble or the aged. In one corner

is a small circle devoted to those who are too old or weak to keep time with the rest, and along a wall near at hand is a foot-path, worn smooth by an old man too weak even to join the cripples' circle. The men have been slowly gathering from the various storeys in his block. Here they come—A1, A2, A3, A4, the numbers in each of the four groups running from 1 to 36. Altogether, some 90 or 100 men assemble. The warder bringing up the rear of the men has arrived; the yard door is locked; the voice of the chief warder on duty is heard: "Halt! Step off sharp with the left. March!" and we begin moving steadily in a kind of half-trot round the circles, keeping the centre thereof ever to our left. Not a word is spoken. To prevent this we are kept at a distance of two

yards from each other, and the four warders at the cardinal points watch us with eyes keen as eagles. Tramp, tramp, tramp, tramp, the dull, monotonous sound is heard for some thirty-five minutes, and at its conclusion you are taken from the fleeting sunshine to the coldness and gloom of solitary confinement. At 11.15 the signal is given for the "Inspection." A warder unlocks the door as you spring to your place at its right. The Governor, or one of his subordinates, passes slowly along. He makes a temporary halt before each cell sufficient to ask: "All right?" and the warder who follows upon his heels once more locks the door. From this time onward the key is seldom turned in the lock, save to admit food. Now and then the Governor or Chaplain calls, and a Visiting Justice

may look in for a few moments, but beyond these infrequent visits and his experiences in the chapel and exercise ground, a prisoner's life is one of almost absolute silence and seclusion. If his sentence is a long one, and he is specially well-behaved, he may at times be taken from his cell to perform some menial occupation, and in very rare instances to work at his trade. But the number of such men is limited, and for those whose sentences are a month or less, there is no relief whatsoever from the monotony of solitude and enforced silence.

None of the prisoners, whether his sentence be long or short, has any contact with the outer world. Over the prison walls he may now and then catch glimpses of familiar landmarks as he trots his weary round in the exercise yard,

and in the silence of the early night or morning hear the rumbling of the carts in the streets not far away; but with these rare exceptions he is shut out from converse with the world, and is for all practical purposes a dead man in a dead universe. The nation may pass through the throes of a general election, and he not know of it; a change of dynasty take place, and the only intimation he would have of it would be the alteration of the name in the prayer for the reigning monarch. He never hears the sound of a woman's voice, nor the musical prattle of children. Birds never sing to him; they seem to shun a prison as a pestilential spot. There is not a flower or blade of grass to be seen anywhere. A Visiting Justice came into my cell one day with a damask rose in his button-hole.

Never before had its colour appeared so rich, or its influence so sensuous and delicate. I could have devoured it had not its possessor appeared so pompous and formal. A prisoner's friends may pay him a visit once in three months, but the interview must not extend further than twenty minutes. In the same period he may write one letter and receive one, but here end his privileges in this respect. He may be in hospital for months, and lie even at death's door, and his friends not know of it. Letters innumerable may be addressed to him, but (though they will be opened by the Governor) they will never reach his hands or knowledge. He cannot strike up an acquaintance with a fellow-prisoner. Beyond a stolen word uttered in chapel or at exercise when the warder is not looking, he never

speaks to a living soul. No conversation on any subject whatever is permissible between prisoner and warder. He may question the latter as he stands in his doorway, and obtain laconic replies, but if the official ventures across the threshold, and his voice is heard in conversation, the inspector on duty rattles his keys from the central dome, and no further word is possible. Such a thing happened to me one day when the librarian-warder entered my cell to consult a list of authors I had drawn up. He was proceeding to explain my limited privileges in the way of literature, when the keys sounded, and he hurried outwards and away.

In this enforced solitude the hours drag wearily on. From lack of other interests the prisoner begins to distinguish the sounds in the corridor.

His warder's footsteps become familiar, and the different voices, at first a mere jumble of sound, become gradually distinct and articulate. At 6.30 each morning he listens for the names of the prisoners who are being dismissed at the conclusion of their sentence, and at 4.30 in the afternoon he hears the tramp and roll-call of new arrivals. Now and then he catches a word or two which afford him a clue to what is happening around him. One morning I heard a sound which thrilled my every fibre and chilled me to the bone. An awful shriek rent the silent atmosphere, a shriek followed by a howl as from a soul in mortal terror. It ceased as suddenly as it begun. I waited silently for a while behind my cell door, listening for its repetition, but it never came. Footsteps approached,

and then I heard a voice, "He wanted to turn back." That was all, but it served to throw light upon the horrible mystery. A prisoner sentenced to the lash was being conducted from his cell to the place of punishment, and as he emerged, his courage failed him, and, shrieking in terror, he sought to regain the shelter of his cell. They doubtless gagged him and hurried him away.

Sounds such as this are of rare occurrence. Generally speaking, the prisoner merely hears the noise of hurrying feet, the voices of the warders as they talk to each other or shout at the prisoners, the ringing of bells, and at night, when all is still, the muffled tread of the guard on duty as he speeds past his door on his watchful errand. At the clanging of the hours between

bed-time and rising, he hears the double blow of the yard-warder as he strikes slow and measured on the locked and bolted outer door. If the prisoner listens carefully, he may sometimes catch the echo of the watchman's footstep outside beneath his prison window. During the daytime he can hear his fellow-prisoners as they walk their cells or try to rap communication with each other. As each meal-hour approaches they drop all work, and peregrinate their cells, moving to and fro with measured tread. At times one of them may break into faint snatches of song. On one occasion I heard a prisoner strike up "Sweet Marie, come to me," but instead of the vision of loveliness invoked, he saw the observation shutter in his cell door pushed aside, and heard the gruff voice of his

warder: "I'll give yer 'Sweet Marie' if yer don't shut up." A prisoner somewhere overhead was given to step-dancing, and after supper frequently treated us to the double-shuffle and break-down. Immediately over me was a pale and sickly youth, evidently consumptive. I learned the position of his cell from the letter and number on his coat. His cough often troubled me through the night, and once, as he moaned more loudly than usual, there came a voice from an adjoining cell, "Buck up, old fellow, it won't be for ever!" The man on my left was extremely quiet. It was only now and then that I was made conscious of his presence. From the length of his hair (it had remained uncut) and the stripe on his arm, I judged that he had been in prison about six weeks.

He appeared to be of the clerkly class, and seemed to feel his position very keenly. At times he forgot himself and his surroundings, and then I was treated to the music of a pure tenor voice as it softly crooned a song learned in other and brighter days.

Such are the sounds which impinge upon the prisoner's ear as he sits in his lonely cell. Hearing is the only sense developed in him, and it grows more keen with each returning day. Imagine a blind man, denied human intercourse, with power of motion only in a space 14 feet by 7, whose only contact with a limited outside world comes through ceiling, walls, and iron door, and you can form a faint idea of what life in a prison must be. A prisoner sees nothing beyond the limits of his

cell; feels only its discomforts; tastes the prescribed prison fare; hears the limited sounds of his strange environment; and smells little beyond the scent of the creosote as it exhales from the oakum. Without it, or work corresponding to it, solitary confinement would deprive a man of his reason. I marvel at the fewness of suicides in prison cells. Their comparative absence must be attributed either to lack of opportunity or to the fact that oakum picking, by its tedium and monotony, robs a man of all activity of mind or body. Hour after hour he sits alone, untying knots, untwisting tarred rope, and then pulling it asunder until it is restored to its original fibre. It is the prisoner's sole companion. Little wonder that he learns almost to love it. In the day it passes the time, and

in the night it becomes his best friend, for then, when the warders are less watchful, he contrives to use its driest portion as a mattress wherewith to soften the hardness of his "bed."

No work is served out on Sunday, and it is a dreary day. The tramp of numberless feet, as my companions moved to and fro in their narrow compass, lingers sadly in my ear. Tramp, tramp, tramp they went for hours, speaking of a vacuity of mind and wretchedness of spirit in tones more eloquent than words. It is the bounding, vigorous, freedom-loving, nervous animal that most parades its cage. For myself, since the books I wanted were denied me, I asked for and obtained an extra quantity of work on the Saturday morning, and made it last two days instead of one. I found

it preferable to spend my Sabbath thus, rather than consume my soul and body in *ennui.* A perfectly empty day would have almost driven me mad. To slightly alter the phrase of Dante, over each prison gate should be carved the words: "Abandon life all ye who enter here." Day follows day, act follows act, in wearying sameness and monotony, until the prisoner ceases to possess active virile life. He exists, it is true, but that merely as in a dream.

CHAPTER IV

BOOKS

IT is in its provision for intellectual recreation that the refined tortures of our prison system are most apparent. In thinking of my coming incarceration I had always anticipated that I should perform menial tasks, dress (at least externally) like the rank and file, and also submit to the rigours of bed and diet; but, while foreseeing these hardships, I had solaced myself with the thought that I should find boon companionship in my beloved books. Shakespeare and the Bible would suffice, I thought, to keep me interested for a month; and in

the joy of this idea the sting of prison life was taken away. When the worst came to the worst I could mount upon the wings of fancy, and forget my pain and the degradation of my surroundings. So ran my dream. The awakening was both rude and painful. It came on the morning after admission with the advent of the afore-mentioned librarian-warder. He wheeled a kind of light hand-cart, on four rubber-clad wheels, to the door of my cell, and gathered therefrom a Bible, Prayer Book, Hymns Ancient and Modern, a tract entitled "Christianity, the Poor Man's Friend," and "Christ, a Present Saviour." I rapidly perused the latter, and found it a work such as is read by penitents in preparation for the advent of a parochial mission. The tract served only to rouse my ire, since it

contained a most ignorant travesty of and attack upon the very opinions for the preaching of which I found myself in prison. I had scarcely finished this cursory examination when the Deputy-Governor appeared. I stated my desire for Shakespeare, and was at once refused. He directed me to the prison regulations hanging up in the cell, and I there found that, as a prisoner sentenced to a month, I was only entitled to read "approved books of instruction." I was proceeding to argue that Shakespeare was a "book of instruction," when he cut me short by saying that the rules had been amended so as to read "approved books of moral instruction." Here was my chance, and I made the most of it. Shakespeare was pre-eminently a moral educator. I afterwards repeated this

argument to the chaplain, and he acquiesced with the words, "Yes, for in Shakespeare's plays we always see virtue rewarded and vice punished." Persuasion on these lines was powerless with the Deputy-Governor, and he retired, leaving me with "A Present Saviour" as the only representative of general literature. Before closing the door, however, I learned that he did not approve of the Immortal Bard, and from a friendly source I have since gleaned the fact that to others he expressed his disapproval in these words: "What! give a prisoner a book with 'Don Juan' in it?" Of such is the governorship of our prisons!

One ray of hope remained. Perhaps the chaplain might prove a man of intelligence and common-sense, and hence be willing to accept my view that,

for such a prisoner as I, Shakespeare might reasonably be held to be a "book of moral instruction." I rang my bell to ask that I might see him, and, as luck would have it, the chaplain himself unlocked the door before the warder could respond to my call. At once I preferred my request. In his reply he was both sympathetic and helpful, but, as the Deputy-Governor had refused the book, he could not give it to me without the sanction of the Governor, who, he said, would not return from his holidays for several days. However, within the limits of the library he undertook to get me any other book I might name. I remembered that years before I had experienced great pleasure in the study of Butler's "Analogy," and I asked for it. It was not to be found in the prison, but

my next selection proved more lucky. I asked for and obtained Gibbon's "Decline and Fall."

The following day, which was Sunday, I spent hours in its perusal, being interrupted but once by a Visiting Justice. In answer to his question as to whether I had any complaints to make, I told him of my experiences regarding Shakespeare. He left me with the promise that he would do all he could on my behalf. On the following Wednesday, having learned that the Governor had returned, I asked to be allowed to see him. The chaplain had told me that I should find him both kind and courteous, and that in all probability he would grant my request. My experience of him on this occasion falsified the description and prophecy in all respects. It

seemed to me that the Deputy-Governor or some one else had prepared him for the interview, and he came in his strictest and sternest mood. With peremptory rudeness he curtly declined my petition, and told me that in asking for such a book I was simply wasting his time. I saw that further argument was useless. My last hope of getting sensible treatment did not, however, abandon me.

Every Visiting Justice that came to interview me (and, using my powers in this respect to their utmost limit, I asked to see every one that came into the prison) heard my complaint that I was denied the one book which I really desired, and had others thrust upon me which were worse than useless. The Governor generally escorted them on these occasions, and I thus got frequent

opportunities of discussing the question over and over again. I later found out that the approval of the "books of moral instruction" did not rest with the Governor, but with a representative of the Prisons' Commissioners. Not knowing this at the time, I argued as though the Governor could have given me the book had he approved of it, and it was not until absolute physical exhaustion set in that I finally dropped the subject. That he had some power of selection in the matter I am firmly convinced. It was evident, however, that, like the Deputy-Governor, he did not approve of Shakespeare being read by the prisoners under his charge. I gleaned this fact from him one day when we were alone, and when I had urged my claim with more than usual vehemence. I then learned that

he considered Shakespeare to be an immoral book. He did not dare to say so in set terms, but he suggested it in no unmistakable way. I argued the point only by way of question. "What! Hamlet?" I replied, and he shook his head and said, "Oh, of course, every body knows 'Hamlet.'" "Well, then, 'King Lear,' 'The Tempest,' 'Midsummer Night's Dream,' 'Twelfth Night'?" but he had no answer. I felt it impossible to argue the matter otherwise, feeling very much as George the Third did when a budding author presented "An Apology for the Bible," and asked to be allowed to inscribe it to His Majesty. "I never knew," was the monarch's reply, "that the Bible required an apology."

So far as Shakespeare's works were

concerned, I thereafter gave up the unequal contest with the Governor. It was a staggerer to find a Rip Van Winkle at the end of the nineteenth century who still believed that Shakespeare was immoral. From a quiet conversation I had with the Governor afterwards, I was led to understand that he was an Evangelical in religion, of the strictest sect, and that he believed he was commissioned of Heaven to save my immortal soul. It was quite evident that Shakespeare, as the representative of refined and elevating literature, did not enter into his scheme of salvation. His attentions in this respect were too personal to be kind. He would have performed a more Christian act if, instead of cramming me with tracts which only served to irritate me, he had given me the book

which more than any other would have helped to pass the miserable hours away. For the Good Samaritan "to pour in oil and wine," was one thing; it would have been another had he gashed the wounds afresh in the name of Christian morality.

Before leaving my cell, on the morning of our first interview, he suddenly asked to see the book I possessed. I handed him "Gibbon," and at once his brow clouded. "Who's been breaking the rules?" he cried. There was nothing for it but to confess that the chaplain had favoured me. He hurried to the door of the cell, and beckoned to the librarian-warder. The latter came, in evident fear and trembling, and explained that he was not responsible for its presence. Here was a pretty go! Shakespeare denied me, and Gibbon

snatched from my hands! Nothing but blackness and emptiness stared me in the face. I asked *what* books I might have, and the Governor proffered me a bundle of tracts! On my shrugging my shoulders, he suggested an Algebra, and we finally compromised the matter with a Euclid.

This by no means closed the incident on my part. As I was entitled to "approved books of moral instruction," I asked whether he would consider that works dealing with mental and moral philosophy came within that category. I received a kind of half-assent to the suggestion, and had already made my plans ere the book of "Plane Geometry" reached me. My scheme was to draft a list of philosophical works, to present it to the librarian in order to discover which of them was in the

library, and then to ask the Governor for its use.

I drew up the list, and amused myself considerably in the process. Beginning with Aristotle's "Ethics," I went through all the philosophical schools from his time onwards. The Middle Ages presented me with Bacon, the succeeding period with Cudworth and the Christian Platonists. I tabulated Kant, Fichte, Spinoza, Descartes, Berkeley, Locke, Hume, Sir William Hamilton, Comte, Adam Smith, and Sedgwick. I also asked for Schwegler's "History of Philosophy," and evinced an interest in Swedenborg and John Stuart Mill. I ransacked my brains for the titles of every book of note dealing with mental and moral philosophy which I had come across in my wanderings

through bookland, from Bacon's "Novum Organum," to Green's "Prolegomena." I laid every philosophic author I could remember under tribute, piled system upon system, until the result was bewildering alike in number and variety. I filled my slate with their names and titles. It was a Sunday when I had finished, and the librarian-warder was on duty. (I knew this from the fact that he had brought my pudding at noon.) I rang the bell, and then watched his face as he read the list. It was a study. I imagine that in all probability he had never seen so conglomerate or strange a catalogue before. It evidently impressed him. I asked him to put a cross opposite the names of those authors which were in the library, and, passing line after line, he

at last marked Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill. Pressed to say if he had not a work on moral philosophy in the library, he replied that there was a book on philosophy of some sort, but he did not know what it was about. It might have been "The Philosophy of Prayer" for all he appeared to know.

When next the Governor appeared, I asked him whether I might read this shadowy work on moral philosophy. I thought I had at last nailed him with a request for a "book of moral instruction." I did not attempt to plead for Adam Smith or Mill, as the warder could not say whether Smith's "Moral Sentiments," or his "Wealth of Nations" was in hand, while Mill was a little too risky for a gentleman who considered Shakespeare immoral. As I have said, then, I asked

for the book of philosophy. I might have spared myself all the trouble I had taken. The book was refused me on the ground that it was a "library book," and such delights were not for prisoners until they had served three months in gaol! I retired from the struggle, and for a fortnight possessed that "approved book of moral instruction," yclept "Plane Geometry." What a farce! Classic authors were denied me on the ground that they were lacking in moral stimulus! Euclid was loaned to me as a moral instructor! The prison rules said that I was entitled to "approved books of moral instruction." The Governor, when pressed, said that this was the limit of my claim, and that my repeated requests for general reading were only so many attempts to induce him to break the rules.

Yet, of his own free will and choice, he offered me a school book contrary to their spirit and tenor. Shakespeare would have soothed and elevated me. My futile struggle to obtain his creations only served to irritate and weaken me; and for consolation and moral instruction I had presented to me—Euclid! The least spark of humour would have saved the Governor from the ridiculousness of such an act. I should have enjoyed the joke myself had it not been that the affair was at the moment too tragically serious. Men with well-stocked libraries at command cannot imagine the condition of a prisoner, brought up to love books, suddenly bereft of his closest and dearest friends.

For about a fortnight I paid my literary prize scant attention, preferring rather to

pick oakum than re-cross the "Pons Asinorum." Yet even this occupation palled at last, and to relieve the tedium, I turned to my "moral" educator. I toyed with 1-47 again, cast the second book into algebraical form, glanced through the next four books, and then turned to the entrancing study of trigonometry in the form it was stated nearly fifty years ago. I next tried my my hand on "A new and improved method of Quadrating the Circle," but as I knew that the attempt was foredoomed to failure, I entered upon the task with little zeal. The days dragged wearily on. I began to feel mentally and morally swamped by my surroundings, and I experienced an inexpressible longing for the books on my shelves at home.

From my glance at the moral pabulum provided by the authorities on the morning after my arrival, all desire for a repetition of the dose was long delayed, but at last even Euclid, spiced as it was with "Trig" and the "Quadrature Problem," failed as a "moral" elevator, and I sought for pastures new. As an experiment I asked for the bundle of tracts which the Governor had valued higher than Shakespeare in his first visit. Ye gods! What a "book of moral instruction" it was, to be sure! I found that some of the tracts were octogenarians. One was dated 1815. The friskiest among them was of some fifty summers. They dealt in the main with subjects that were matters of controversy at the end of the last century and the beginning of this. Imagine a tract against Hume's

Deism as a "moral instructor" in an age when the term itself is forgotten, and provided, it must be remembered, for a class of men to whom Hume must be absolutely unknown! The "Atheism" of Thomas Paine came in for a large share of adverse attention. I commend this fact to the attention of Moncure D. Conway. Other tracts in the bundle dealt with such trifles as "Owenism" and "Chartism," and traced both these movements to a source not generally mentioned to polite ears. Into this fare imagine a *soupçon* of warning against eternal damnation, and a general exhortation to look upon yourself as of the blackest and vilest scum of the earth, and you will have a pretty fair idea of a medium sample of the moral and elevating literature which is ladled

out to brighten the lives and cheer the hearts of the unfortunate dwellers in Her Majesty's prisons. Little wonder is it that this book, notwithstanding its great age, was but little soiled. An explanation was hereby afforded me of the tramp, tramp, tramp, I heard continuously in the prison. The prisoner, able to read, would doubtless pick up these "books of moral instruction" in the first vacant moment he possessed, and on finding out their tone and quality would naturally close them more suddenly than they were opened. Ninety-nine per cent. of sensible persons outside a prison would do the same. Who wants to thrash the dialectical chaff of a hundred years ago, or read the malignment of persons who are dead? *De mortuis nix nisi bonum* is a motto evidently not

acted upon by the Prisons' Commissioners in the selection of prison literature. Their leading principle seems really to be that "anything is good enough for a prisoner, provided it is uninteresting." Even the so-called "library books," which are loaned to the well-behaved men and women who have done a long term, are in the main only such as would be given to Sunday-School children of from ten to twelve years of age. The occupants of our prisons are in fact treated either as canting cowards, fools, or children; and any desire they evince for bright and wholesome reading is regarded as a dangerous tendency which is to be suppressed at all costs. Were these "library books" all that could be desired, yet the mischief is done in the

first moment of prison life. During the first three months the prisoner's reading is such as repels him. As a time-gap he acquires the habit of parading his cell, and whenever good books are allowed him under the present regulations, the habit has grown to be irresistible, hence it is that they too, like the tracts, go unread.

CHAPTER V

A MACHINE SYSTEM, WOODENLY ADMINISTERED

"A MACHINE system, woodenly administered," is the only phrase which justly and completely describes the routine and administration of a prison. It was the one which I frequently used in conversation with the Governor and the Visiting Justices in Strangeways, and now, after months of calm deliberation, I see no reason whatever to change the verdict. I received the first intimation of the utter inflexibility of prison administration when I had to "declare" my possessions to the receiving warder. Amongst these was a

quill toothpick, and as I was keeping it back for use in prison, I was summarily stopped with the gruffest of gruff intimations: "Yer won't want no toothpicks in here." My experience of prison diet served in the main to corroborate this assertion, yet, for all that, the man might have been less surly, and after all, a toothpick would not have harmed any one.

I have spoken before-time of the appeal I addressed to the medical officer to be allowed to wear the underclothing I had brought with me into the prison. In preferring this request, I pointed out that the under-vest which had been served out to me was so wide as to be slipping from my shoulders. This, to a man such as I, with a general tendency to relaxed throat and lung weakness, constituted a grave physical danger. On his referring me to the

Governor, I lost no time in making my wants known in the proper quarter. When the Deputy-Governor appeared the next morning he gave a point blank refusal to my request for permission to wear my own under-garments, but changed the prison vest for a smaller one. On the same occasion, I drew the Deputy-Governor's attention to the condition of the comb and brush. They were both filthily dirty, and bore evident traces of the duties they had performed on numberless uncleanly heads. They were scarcely fit to be touched, much less used. As I held the brush up to view, his brief comment thereon was, "Wash it." Nothing short of a baptism of fire could have made it pure. I complained about this matter to a Visiting Justice the next morning, and a clean

brush and comb were served out to me. This was considerably more than I had asked for. A comb and brush lay in my hand-bag within the precincts of the prison. It would have been less trouble to the prison authorities had they permitted me to use them.

My next demand was to be allowed the use of my sponge-bag. Horror of horrors! Such a thing was preposterous. No prisoner had evidently dared to ask to be allowed to provide himself with this general accompaniment of cleanliness. Almost in despair, and little thinking that so simple and natural a request would be denied, I suggested that perhaps he would give instructions that my tooth-brush should be allowed me. Once more I had asked too much! Cleanliness may be next to Godliness, but a prisoner is not

allowed to use its necessary accompaniments. For a whole month I had to wash in a pannikin little larger than a glorified soup dish, and the only other opportunity or means of cleanliness which was afforded me was when, in conjunction with the other men of my block, I was taken to have the fortnightly bath. The *modus operandi* of this luxury is as follows: Some eight or nine doors are flung open to the accompaniment of the word "bath." As many prisoners, carrying their towels and soap, are then marched in Indian file to the baths. These latter are underground. Arrived at the tubs, the men wait the exit of as many more prisoners who are at that moment endeavouring to wash themselves. Introduced to the bath, each prisoner finds about two inches of fresh water, and in this he may

disport himself for a few seconds, and attempt to cleanse himself with the aid of the microscopic piece of soap brought with him from his cell. It must be remembered that this latter is never allowed to exceed the size of a domino. No flannel, brush, or sponge is either provided or allowed. The towel is of the size and material generally used for wiping tea-cups. Under these conditions the efficacy of the "bath" for its purpose can be pretty well imagined. When these things are taken in conjunction with the obvious desire of the warders to hurry things up (the small quantity of water was evidently doled out solely with this end in view), my readers will see that it is impossible for any one to have a bath in the true sense of that word, much less to enjoy it.

During the time I was imprisoned I was not provided with any means for trimming my finger nails, and they grew into talons, with painful result. Every now and then, one would break off in a contest with an unusually hard knot or a too-well tarred piece of rope. It was impossible to keep the hands clean under such conditions. At the end of a fortnight I bit my nails as well as I could, and also secreted a small piece of wire found in the oakum for the purpose of cleaning away the dirt thereunder. In one of his examinations of the cell, my warder found this piece of wire, and walked away with it, notwithstanding my explanation of its cleanly and necessary uses. He had received instructions, he said, to remove all such things, and no deviation from the strict line of duty was permissible. At a later

date I received a small wooden skewer which fastened a "make-weight" to my loaf, and, hiding it in my solitary pocket, used it as a nail-scraper to the day of my release. To such shifts are those prisoners put to who desire to maintain the decencies of cleanly society! Little wonder is it if the prisoners after a while lose their self-respect in matters of personal appearance. My experience in these respects was all the more galling as I had taken the forethought to provide for such contingencies. All the *matériel* I required for personal cleanliness was lying safely ensconced in my bag in a part of the prison building some three minutes' walk away. The only argument I ever heard against my using them was that the Prisons' Commissioners had specified the things which should be in every cell.

Nothing beyond the list was allowable. It proved useless to argue that since the Commissioners had never declared against a tooth-brush, such an article might be provided by a prisoner for his own use. The Governor, as well as his Deputy, were both obdurate upon this point. On one occasion I asked the former whether the foundations of all moral discipline in the prison would have broken down if I had had my sponge-bag hanging up in the cell. He lifted his eyebrows in a kind of holy horror at the audacity of the remark. It took his breath away, and he had only sufficient left to ejaculate—"What if every prisoner wanted such things?" Yes, what if they did? It would not cause a fraction of trouble nor disturb the routine of prison life were any to do so, and the demand

in itself would be an evidence of refined, cleanly tastes such as every sensible man would hail with pleasure and satisfaction. Not so, however, was the opinion of these tape-bound souls. Had I asked to be allowed to introduce a pound of dynamite into the prison, I could not have shocked the officials more than I did in asking for a tooth-brush, or been more curtly and emphatically refused. As I have occasion to say in a later chapter, I do not blame the men for this so much as the system they are called upon to administer. The mechanism and routine of prison life have robbed them of all power of sympathy or elasticity. To them a prisoner is a cog in a wheel. He must not be different from his fellows. Any manifestation of individual tastes or desires is an offence against prison discipline amounting almost to a

crime. As the Deputy-Governor confessed, he would not allow me to have things different to the other prisoners. "No," I replied, "while in prison I am not a man, I am only A. 2. 8." and his answer was, "You have hit the nail exactly."

One method of refusing a prisoner's demand in those things in which the local authorities have power of choice is that of reference from official to official. At the time of my admission I was in weak health, and was, in consequence, wearing a throat plaster. On asking the doctor to be allowed to have an extra one in my cell in case of contingencies, he referred me to the Deputy-Governor. On seeing the latter, he told me to speak to the doctor. When next I saw the latter gentleman I asked for it once more, and

was a second time referred to the Deputy. It proved useless to tell him that the Deputy-Governor had himself sent me to the doctor. He refused to act without authority from the governing power, and advised me to see the Governor. Needless to say I lost all patience in the matter, and declined to proceed further.

A further evidence of the harsh woodenness of prison administration was afforded me with respect to my plank bed. During the first week of my incarceration my head ached terribly, both from confinement and from the bending attitude which it was necessary to assume in picking the oakum. I informed the Governor of this on his first visit, and asked to be allowed, when my day's work was done, to stretch myself backward on the "bed," with a view to counteracting the bad result of

the forward stoop. Like the innocent request for my tooth-brush, it was refused, as though bordering upon the preposterous. It would be a breach of the prison rules, he said. The regulations provided for my going to bed at eight o'clock, and if the warder on duty found me in bed before that hour, it would be his duty to report me. It was once more fruitless to urge that I did not want to go to bed before the usual time, that, in fact, I only wanted to lie down in my clothes on the bare boards after supper. As this demand, arising out of the simple needs of health, was refused me, there was nothing for it but to stretch myself night after night on the cold, tiled floor, and to trust that I should prove to have vitality enough to withstand its dangers.

A second act of cruelty, proceeding

from the machine-like character of prison administration, was inflicted upon me in another form. To make its character fully apparent, it is necessary to explain that the only sitting accommodation provided in a cell is a child's wooden buffet, of medium height, and with a perfectly flat top. Imagine yourself compelled to sit upon this hard, smooth surface day after day, and condemned to lie night after night upon a "bed" equally hard and smooth. You will then begin to understand that after a few days and nights of this experience the prisoner, new to such things, becomes "saddle-sore" (as the cyclists say), and sometimes worse. Such was my own very painful experience. To remedy this state of affairs, I used a small quantity of the oakum as a cushion. I was sitting upon it when the Governor

made his appearance, on the fifth morning of my imprisonment. He made no reference to the matter in my presence, but as soon as he had left the cell the warder unlocked the door and forbade its further use. Complaints had been made, he said, that I was using the oakum. I meekly obeyed, disgusted and ashamed to find any one could be so bereft of ordinary human feelings as to deny me so simple a comfort. I was not damaging the oakum. No rule said that I must sit next the board. Neither was the oakum then required for any other purpose; thereafter it lay idly on the floor at my feet. Comment upon an act so entirely and unnecessarily officious would be superfluous. It speaks the whole tenor and temper of prison life. It is one of the straws showing

the direction of the wind, and again I repeat that, from top to bottom, our prisons are machine systems, woodenly administered.

I could have understood the reasons for the repeated refusals of my simple requests had they involved an addition of thought or trouble to the officials. In a large institution it is not an easy manner to differentiate in matters of treatment, but no one of my requests touched the routine of administration, or involved a treatment really different from that meted out to prisoners of my class. Had I been permitted the use of my own underclothing (the greatest thing I ever asked for, and that alone on the score of weak health), I should have really saved the prison officials both trouble and expense. In the case of my sponge-bag, no one

would have been troubled or injured by its presence in my cell; while, as for books, the granting of reasonable literature to read would have meant a real economy in my own health, and, consequently, in the time and drugs of the medical authorities. No one of these things, like the use of the plank bed, and of oakum for my stool, would have caused the least trouble or necessitated differential treatment. I purposely avoided making any requests which would have led to these results. As I had voluntarily elected to be a prisoner, I mentally determined to obey the prison rules in all points, and to submit myself to the ordinary experiences of a common prisoner. To this end, like every other man, I made my "bed," and scrubbed and washed my floor. I never com-

plained either of food or of lack of attention. In every essential point I lived as a prisoner ought to do. No warder had ever occasion to complain of my conduct, or of lack of obedience to known rules. I was a prisoner, and tried to live as such in all respects. It then seemed, and still seems to me, that the refusal of those things which were needful for health and comfort was both unnecessarily harsh and unjust. As will have been seen, I asked for nothing which, if granted, would have endangered discipline, robbed another prisoner of privileges, or caused any essentially different treatment at the hands of either Governor or warders.

CHAPTER VI

MEN

PICTURE to yourself a tall, square-shouldered, military-looking man, with a slight stoop in the spine, as though he were being jerked forward on horseback. The skin of his face is tanned with the sun, and his side-whiskers and moustachios are iron-grey, his nose is aquiline, and his small grey eyes glance keenly, sometimes kindly, from beneath his over-hanging eyebrows. Excepting when he is roused to smart action, his manner is courteous, and at times he assumes a kindly, almost fatherly aspect.

He wears a hard, round hat, generally of a shade of brown, a grey suit, turn-down collars, and a tie that is held together at the centre with a golden hoop. Imagine this figure looking seventy summers, yet possessed of the activity, almost the vivacity, of youth, with its swift, springy tread, and you may form a fairly correct idea of the appearance of the presiding genius of my prison. At one time an officer in the army, he has now served Her Majesty as Prison Governor for some twenty or thirty years. He carries his military discipline into prison life, though in some respects it is mellowed and softened by age, and by the influences of a spiritual faith — for our Governor is essentially a religious man, though somewhat cramped in his views. Many a time,

at noon, in the interval between meals and work, he goes round the blocks, conversing with the prisoners on questions that affect eternity. In spite of his militarism, he has a kindly soul, and I have reason to believe that the men held him in some degree of regard. His one failing was his blind and unquestioning belief in the efficacy of the prison system. Had it fallen ready-made out of Heaven he could not have accepted it more completely. We had many discussions on this subject. On the occasions when he introduced a Visiting Justice, the conversation generally turned on the supposed efficacy of the prison system to produce personal reform. For my part, I denied absolutely that it possessed any such inherent power, and affirmed that if any man left the prison walls better than when

he entered them, it was in spite of the system, rather than with its help. Imagine, said I, a man of the outer world, tossed and buffetted with a thousand temptations, every one of which makes a demand upon his moral strength and manhood. The test which society imposes proves too great. A moral link breaks in the chain of his life, and society, in self-defence, lodges him here. In this place no demand whatever is made upon him. He is isolated from all the conditions which would render such demands possible. He is fed, clothed, and housed; his work is brought into his cell, and, in common with hundreds of others, he performs an identically non-educative task. No opportunity of distinguishing himself is given. It is practically impossible for

him to be either bad or good. Cellular confinement, coupled with the monotony of his existence, having nursed him into somnolence, he next falls into apathy (not the blissful *apatheia* of the Greek), and at the termination of his sentence he is restored to the world with his moral fibre weakened through disuse. He is, consequently, less capable then of resisting temptation than he was on admission to the prison. It was to no purpose that I sketched the ideal conditions of moral education. In my judgment they are such as make the greatest demand upon us consistent with our powers. The Governor always replied that the ideas and reforms I advocated were either dangerous or impossible.

The Deputy-Governor was a slightly different man. I will not attempt his

description, as pen-and-ink sketches are apt to become tedious. In his dealings with me he never showed any trace either of sympathy or intelligence. It was from him that I learned that "Shakespeare was not a book of moral instruction." I am afraid I did not take kindly to him after that, and must confess to my judgment of him being not a little biassed.

The chaplain, on the other hand, inspired me with different feelings. In the discharge of his duties he called to see me on the morning of my arrival, and we at once drew near to each other in more senses than one. He showed me every possible sympathy and kindness, and on several occasions his manner and bearing revealed the fact that he looked upon me as being more than a

cog in a Juggernaut wheel. He used to come to my cell once or twice a week, and sometimes he would stop an hour or so in the discussion of general topics of interest. Altogether I found him to be the most human of all the officials I met in prison, the least hampered by red tape, and the most willing to do all that lay in his power to soften the hard lot of a prisoner. The best prayer I can utter for him is, that the man may never become merged in the official. It is easy, in the fulfilment of routine duties, for the heart-service of a breathing living humanism to become the mere throb of an engine driven by steam.

I was not a little amused at the differences both of treatment and appearance which manifested themselves in the

doctors that I met. The one to receive me, and with whom I had the most to do, was a tall, lithe, active man of some thirty-five years of age. I mentally christened him "Laconic," he was so brief of speech. A second I named "Pill-Box," from the smartness of his get-up. He appeared at my cell door one morning in faultlessly polished silk tile. He had a clean-shaven face, and from his manner, I judged him to be a *locum tenens* for "Laconic." The third man I saw was the most disagreeable of the lot. He was both abrupt and rude in his speech and behaviour. He seemed to take a delight in making the prisoners appear "small," and had quite a number of ways in which he manifested his want of breeding. He talked to me as

though I were a dog, and had it not been that I was far from well when I saw him, and had also mentally vowed to behave in all respects as a prisoner, I should certainly have taken some vigorous means of showing my disapproval. Speaking generally, however, I cannot complain of the treatment I received from the medical authorities of the prison, and probably "Mr Fussy's" rudeness was due more to thoughtlessness and habit than to malice aforethought.

Some of the warders were fine fellows, others the reverse. The latter belonged to the younger end, and in their attempts to dignify their position by looking severe, they only contrived to make themselves appear surly. Clad with authority, they asserted it upon every

possible occasion, and I frequently heard them shout at the other prisoners as though they were inferior animals. Their general average, however, is by no means bad. In some respects they are of the policeman type, and are drawn from much the same class of men; but they lack the kindly humour and sympathy which characterises "Robert" in the streets. The mechanism of their routine duties, and the severity of discipline, have robbed them of most of the attributes of humanity. They are machines, not men. I never saw one of them smile. Their faces were continuously covered with an impenetrable mask, cold, hard, chilling, almost dismal. As they stood at the cardinal points in the exercise ground, one might have taken them for four mechanical figures,

strangely possessed with keen and piercing eyes, that fastened themselves, eagle-like, on the moving mass of men before them. They were alert, almost to painfulness, though they never seemed to make a single effort. We might have been a company of tigers on the prowl, so keenly were we watched. Probably, in their estimation, we were every whit as dangerous. If you would care to imagine what one of them is like, picture to yourselves a tall, square-shouldered, active man in blue, with epaulettes on his shoulders, and white buttons down his coat. A belt supports a small pouch at his left side, and from this hangs a chain in semi-circle, to which his keys (eloquent symbols of office) are fastened. His cap is beaked like a postman's, and his blue overcoat, worn on wet days,

is buttoned up like that of a French infantry soldier. His tunic fits him like a glove, revealing every movement of his sinuous, muscular form.

The one I have in my mind's eye was a man of about fifty years of age. His brow was lined, and his cheek-bones stood out high and clear. His face was well-nigh devoid of flesh. He also had a beaked nose, and his full, almost coarse, lips were surmounted by a straggling moustache that had grizzled with age. The rest of his face was slightly covered with wiry hair that spoke the barren nature of the soil beneath. In facial appearance he was a veritable Sahara, and the illusion was heightened by its sandy-coloured tone. In his steel-grey eyes he had the look of an eagle, or some other bird of prey,

and his voice was like the crack of a pistol. "HALT! If any one wants to see the Governor let him FALL OUT. Step off sharp with the LEFT. MARCH!" They were the only words he uttered during the forty-five minutes he watched us, and they came volley-fashion from his lips. He was only once with us, but his face and figure will never be forgotten. The other warders seemed tame in comparison with him. He was the living embodiment of the hardness and non-humanity (as distinguished from the inhumanity) of the prison system. There was not an ounce of superfluous flesh on his bones, and he was so erect, yet withal so flexible in his movements, as almost to suggest that his spinal column was made of well-tempered steel. He repelled yet attracted me. I disliked,

yet felt interested in him. He seemed to compel attention, and I spent the whole of that exercise-time in fixing his picture upon the sensitive plate of my retina and memory. I did the same with all the other warders I met, but they were neither so striking or graceful as the one I have outlined above. One of these latter had blue eyes, and as they were so rarely met with in the men of his class, I named him "The Blue-eyed Warder." Just now and then one could find a trace of a smile lingering about his lips. "The Roman" was of a totally different type. He stands before me as I write, with his square jaw and impassible features.

Interesting as were the warders, my study of the prisoners afforded me even greater pleasure. I watched them in

the exercise ground every day, noted their peculiarities of feature and movement, and finally gave each of them a name which fitted their several idiosyncrasies. When I was first ushered into the yard, I saw them only as a confused mass of human beings, as much alike each other as they were identical in dress. Bit by bit they grew to be distinguishable, and then began a mental process which kept me occupied during the remainder of my period of incarceration. The first prisoner to strike my attention was a soldierly-looking man, with a short, crisp beard, and a well-groomed moustachio. He walked with the easy, graceful swing of the athlete, and his shoulders were continually squared, as if ready for defence or onset. I christened him "The Boxer." A

pleasant smile usually played upon his face, and it seemed to light up the exercise ground with a kind of golden beam. He was the first I looked for each morning, and I was very much disappointed when at last I missed him for good. In addition to "The Boxer" there was "The Jockey." He was a small, springy-stepped man. His coat bulged out at the shoulders behind, and at each step his hands and body moved almost convulsively, as though he were astride a horse, and winning "hands down." A third man I named "Leo the Twelfth," from the resemblance he bore to that distinguished prelate. He walked pensively along every morning, with his gaze fixed immovably on the ground at his feet. He might have been composing a homily or arranging

an allocution, and the position of his hands (tucked underneath the bottom of his coat behind), served to heighten the illusion. I named another prisoner "Paris." He was splay-footed and ungainly in movement, but when one passed upward to consider his face, one could not help noting the effeminacy of visage which is generally associated with the name of the Phrygian monarch. "Schopenhauer" was an endless source of amusement to me. Not the pl pher of that name (who could be amused with Schopenhauer?), but a prisoner whom I re-baptised without his knowledge or permission. He belonged to the outer-circle men, and was evidently of a depressed, but, as I have suggested, by no means depressing temperament. His forehead was perpetually crinkled, and his every

action revealed a mind sad but resigned. The question "Is life worth living?" seemed ever upon his lips, and the way in which he now and then sighed and lifted his gaze heavenward, gave the half-answer to his question. "No," it seemed to say, "life is not worth the trouble it involves, but one must make the best of it." Of a totally different temperament was "The Smiler." I gave him this sobriquet because his face was always puckered into what appeared to be a broad grin. His jollity was more apparent than real, as it was chiefly caused by the fact that his teeth had departed with increasing years, and his jaws had taken on the expression which earned for him his name. Another man I named "The Brigand Chief." He was the very image of the beetle-browed basso-profundos that

take the part in Italian opera. His dark, flashing eyes spoke the part to perfection, and his bold, devil-may-care expression rendered any other title impossible. He got near to me in the circle several times, and would persist in addressing me as "Old Boy." "Well, old boy," he would say, "and how are you this morning?" Every other prisoner, young or old, was "Old Boy" to him. I overheard him addressing the same words to a wizened, monkey-faced man who walked between us one morning. I christened the latter "Darwin" for obvious reasons. Other names that come back to me, and that require no elucidating notes, are "The Tipster," "Sunday-School Teacher," "The Good Boy," "The Giant," and "The Schoolmaster." One little old fellow I named "The Hypo-

crite." He was so dolefully dolorous when the warders were looking, but behind their backs he was the embodiment of quiet joviality, especially when, with tongue in his cheek, he was making signals to his friends. One of the prisoners in my block was a mere child, and had obviously only just emerged from hospital when first I caught sight of him. With feeble and halting step he stumbled, rather than walked, round the circle. My heart went out to him in sympathy, and I mentally christened him "The Nursling." An elderly man appeared one morning who had evidently "seen better days." I unconsciously looked for the *pince-nez* in the right hand. He walked with the pre-occupied air and deliberate steps of a member of the Stock Exchange, and ere long

I had him on my list as "The Brother."

With simple expedients such as these I enlightened the "tramp" in the exercise ground, and at the same time gained a closer knowledge of some of the types of character usually to be found within prison walls. Some of them looked to be trustworthy respectable men, with remarkably open, honest-looking faces. A single lapse from the path of rectitude had plunged them amid the criminal class, but, in reality, they were no more members of it than I. Others, on the contrary, were obvious Recidivists, and had probably occupied a prison cell for the bulk of their lives. Such an one was my friend "Darwin." When "The Brigand Chief" enquired about his health, he followed his query with, "How long

are you here for?" and "The Missing Link" replied, "Only a month. It's nowt (nothing), that isn't, it's only a tweeze. I shall soon do that bit." There was a hang-dog, reckless, negligent expression about these men. They could easily be picked out from their more respectable comrades, and it appeared a shame that good and bad should be thus hurled pell-mell together. I fully expect that one day, as I am passing some low public-house in the slums of the city, I shall find myself accosted by "The Brigand Chief," with a "Well, old boy, how are you getting on to-day: will it run to a drink?"

CHAPTER VII

"PRISONERS SHALL NOT COMMUNICATE".

"PRISONERS shall not communicate, or attempt to do so, with one another." Such is the first rule of prison life. It is the outcome of years of experience, yet it belongs to a period bespeaking conditions almost totally different from our own. With the advent of popular education, crime assumes a new aspect. It is less brutal, more refined. Animalism is decreasing, and the keen wit and intelligence are taking the place of the bludgeon and the jemmy. Those answerable for prison rules and discipline appear to be unconscious of these changes, and

they still deal with the men in their charge, as though they constantly feared an *émeute* among them. Wild animals and dangerous lunatics are not more watched and spied upon than are the inhabitants of our prisons. A look, a word passing from one to another is a punishable offence. It is very conceivable that grave social evils would be engendered if liberty of speech were indiscriminately allowed to the baser elements, but these are easily distinguishable from those of a gentler kind, and if some system of classification were adopted, it would not be difficult to arrange conditions under which healthy intercourse could be carried on between (at least) these latter prisoners. Man is a social animal, and his natural instincts will and do manifest themselves in spite of all rules and regulations to the

contrary. It is a well-known fact that the prisoners do "communicate" with one another, notwithstanding the most careful vigilance of the officials and warders.

The methods adopted to effect this breach of the rules are considerably varied. Messages are written on W.C. walls, or conveyed by a code of signals. In the exercise yard, for example, you may at times perceive a prisoner making sly movements with his thumbs and fingers—a fact which leads to the natural observation that the dumb and deaf alphabet is now and then put to uses other than those for which it was originally intended. While at exercise, you frequently hear a voice issuing as it seems from nowhere, and directed upon no object. No movement whatever indicates either speaker or listener. Old prisoners are past-masters in

the art of ventriloquism. The words appear to be formed at the back of their throats, and are so low in tone that unless you have a remarkably keen ear they speak to you in vain. Brief conversations are continuously being carried on during the whole of the time the men are at exercise. The way it is managed is as follows: A man either arranges to get immediately behind his friend on one of the exercise rings, or to speak to him from an adjacent circle. If you will recall to your mind the conditions of exercise, you will see that the men in the inner rings complete the circuit more frequently than those outside.

This results in the fact that the prisoners inside are constantly arriving abreast of and passing their comrades on the outer curve. You will also remember

again that the warders stand at the four cardinal points of the circles, and that, between them, there is a kind of neutral ground comparatively beyond their sight, though not out of their range of hearing. Immediately, then, on passing a warder, the prisoner utters his message from, as it were, between his teeth. His "pal" repeats the same process on their passing the next, or when his onward march brings him once more adjacent to him on another ring. In this way a snatchy conversation may be carried on for half an hour, and the warders, while hearing voices, are unable to detect the offenders. I have known them to miss a guilty prisoner, and condemn one who was perfectly innocent. Although brief dialogues may be carried on in the manner and at the time indicated, the best occasion

for conversation is just before the prisoners are conducted to their cells. When the signal is given that they are to be taken back, two of the four warders leave the yard to watch the passages along which the prisoners have to march. This leaves the men practically unguarded, and as they slowly file away, hurried voices are heard on all hands asking and answering questions. I never before realised what it must have meant to Joan of Arc to receive messages from intangible visitants. The very air was electric with language, yet no one seemed to speak. Their words, after all, were inoffensively simple. They generally expressed a concern for some one's health, the duration of their imprisonment, or the date of their release. I never heard any one ask another what he was in prison for. It seemed a point in prison

etiquette not to refer to crimes committed.

Once back in their cells one would imagine that all intercommunication between the prisoners was severed. Not so. Walls are good conductors of sound, and the "old hands" possess a code of signals by means of which they correspond with one another. I have before explained that I had scarcely settled down in my cell when "Rub-a-dub-dub — dub-dub-a-dub" was signalled by my neighbour. Shorter and then longer signals followed, all of which were unintelligible to me, but which had, in "prison language," their suitable and adequate replies. As I was unable to respond to these signals they gradually died away. Many a time, in the evening silence, I caught far-away echoes of these sounds. At other times actual voices

could be heard of men speaking to each other from opposite sides of a partition wall. An old gaol-bird informs me that the W.C. system used to be the favourite avenue of communication. Emptying the bowl of its water, they converted the refuse pipes into speaking-tubes. By this morally disgusting and physically dangerous means a prisoner used to carry on regular conversations with any one or all of the other seven prisoners connected with the drain-pipe of his cell. Under the pail system, this is done away with now.

Prisoners of intelligence cannot possibly be balked in the exercise of their natural faculties. If they cannot speak in the cells they may do so in the chapel. In this building they sit cheek by jowl with each other, and, although the warder's glance is never absent, it is not difficult under such

conditions to "communicate." We will suppose for a moment that the opening hymn is "Nearer my God to Thee." An intending conversationalist sings the first word of each line lustily, and then breaks into a lower tone as he asks or answers questions. The following is a sample of the kind of thing one hears in chapel :—

(*Cres.*) "Nearer" (*dim.*) "How are you, Jack?"
" " " "All right."
" "E'en" " "When are you going out?"
" "That" " "Monday week, etc., etc."

The longer the line of the hymn, the greater possibility there is of squeezing a long sentence in the place of the one to be sung. In the prayers, again, one is sometimes surprised with observations *not* addressed to the Deity, and the general confession and responses of the Anglican service are perfect Golcondas of opportunity for the experienced gaol-bird.

Nor are their avenues of communication limited to these. It is found possible for prisoners to open up negotiations with each other, although they may be too far off to permit of the wall-signals being effective and may also chance never to sit together in chapel. The *modus operandi* in this case is very simple. It merely consists of taps on the windows of the cell. These taps sound out clearly in the yard below, and can be heard by the inmates of the cells within a fairly large range. For quite a long time I lightened the tedium of oakum picking with listening to a couple of prisoners who had adopted this method of "communication." They talked to each other at almost every hour of the day, but their chief opportunities were at noon and after supper, *i.e.* times in

which the warders were either less vigilant or away. "A-tap-a; a-a-tap; tap, a-a-a-a, a, a-tap-a, a" (*i.e.* in telegraphic code, "R' U' There?") used to ring out into the silence and vacancy of the outer court, and was answered with a "Tap-a-tap-tap" (*i.e.* Y—Yes), and then the conversation began, to be concluded, mayhap, with a hurried signal which told that one of them had heard the steps of an approaching warder. One of these telegraphic operants appeared to use a slate-pencil wherewith to produce the sounds on the glass of the window, and the other used the bottom or edge of his drinking-can. The noise made by their tapping was similar to that produced by the click of the Morse, or "needle sounder," in a suburban telegraph office. "Prisoners shall not communicate," is a dead letter

for the experienced hands, and yet, if complete isolation is to be the order of the day, these constitute the very class most requiring to be secluded. As may naturally be supposed, the new hands are not up to these tricks of the recid[illegible], and consequently the prisoners who are the least dangerous are condemned to all the rigours of solitary confinement at the very time when the heart craves the most for human converse and sympathy.

I have reserved the least effective, but infinitely more suggestive mode of communication to the last. Remember for a moment that a modern prison is an institution in the which from two to three thousand meal-tins are in daily use. These cans offer a smooth, blank surface on which may be scratched any hieroglyphic or message a prisoner pleases.

He has finished his dinner, say, and it will be nearly half an hour before the warder returns for his empty can. He knows that hidden somewhere, in one of the thousand cells, some friend or acquaintance is imprisoned? What thing more natural than that he should send a message to his friend. One only regrets that its naturalness somewhat obscures the act as an expression of almost infinite faith and hope. The most amazing part of the proceeding is that sometimes the messages reach their destination and obtain suitable replies. Noah could not have looked for the return of the dove with greater eagerness than that felt by the inmate of a prison cell, as he, figuratively, launches his message forth into the troubled waters of his strange environment, and patiently awaits the return of

its answer. Probably it never will be brought back to him, and before it reaches its destination, it may be that his scribbled words will be covered over and over again by prisoners as full of faith and hope as himself. Strange palimpsests are these! One might easily build a romance around them. Shuttles of time in the loom of fate, weaving the isolated cells of a prison into an almost intelligent and related whole.

Here are a few samples of the messages I daily scanned as I ate my various meals.* A receiver of stolen goods from a lodging-house, of which he gives the name, tells his accomplices in prison of the fact of his capture, and concludes his message with a hope that his services and sufferings in

* I memorised the words while in prison, and committed them to writing immediately on release.

their behalf will not be allowed to go unrewarded. "Honour among thieves." A prisoner pressing his claims upon his fellow-culprits under the nose of, and by means of, agencies provided by a thoughtful Government! One man, of an evidently sporting turn of mind, tells a friend that he has got a straight tip from the stables, and advises him, when he gets out of prison, to put his money on "Persimmon" for a classic race. He had doubtless been seized before he could deal with the "bookies" himself, and he urges his acquaintance, who, as he pointed out, was to have his liberty before the race was run, to "lay his money on without fear." Another begins with: "Listen, and I will sing you a song." Instead of attempting the impossible, he relates a dream. "Last night," he says, "I dreamt that a

tender-hearted warder knocked at my cell door at dead of night, with a glass of whisky toddy, a pipe, and a match." In his waking moments this appears too good to be true, so he adds: "Oh, if this be so, how can it be that black bread and skilly shall ever more cause me pain?"

The soliloquies one meets with on the food-tins are exceedingly numerous, and if they are not as philosophic as Hamlet's, they at least deal with verities as eternal. In varied guise the bulk of them form a striking comment on the text "Man doth not live by bread alone." One such was "Plenty of beef and beer for the brothers Loney on the 29th of August." The eternal stomach, and its craving needs, provide the ground for pleasantry of an ironical character. "Wouldn't you like a

pork pie?" is a message sent from the women's quarters to the "boys" of a well-known district. The writer of it signs her name and address, and describes herself as a "Drag." Metaphorically speaking, she, like Mother Eve, was "naked and not ashamed." "Cheer up!" "Buck up!" "It won't be for ever!" are words often written, either for personal or fraternal consolation, and the writers of them generally conclude their brief epistles with "So says that happy lad (or girl, as the case may be) from So-and-so," and then follows their name or sobriquet. They all seem to be anxious to describe themselves as "happy," and on one of the tins this had called forth a protest from one of the prisoners, couched in language too vigorous for reproduction: "The man that calls himself happy in this —— place must be a —— fool!"

The termination of their sentences, and the sensuous delights to follow, are an unending theme with the scribbling prisoners. One of them had taken the following curious method of calculating the date of his release: "One more dirty shirt," he writes, "and then I can say 'Good morning!'" Translated for the benefit of the uninitiated, it means that at the end of a week he would have his liberty. Many of them disclose their wishes as to what ought to happen on or before that date. One prisoner writes to another, who is evidently doing a shorter term than he for the same offence, advising him when he leaves prison to "go straight to Leeds," and there await his (the writer's) arrival. Then he proposes that they should go to America together, since, as he adds, "If we stay

here we shall get 'lagged' (*i.e.* imprisoned) again." A message of a totally different character passes between two other prisoners. In this case the one bids the other "Cheer up, it (*i.e.* the term of imprisonment) won't be long! The 'cat' is over now, and the marks are healed" Then, taking a glance into the future, he describes the beef-steak and onions which await them on their release. A youthful and amorous prisoner sends a love-message to a girl in the women's quarters, and he reminds her that they are both to be released on the same date. He bids her to wait for him at the prison gates. "Sweet Belle Mahone" had a slightly different rendezvous imposed upon her. A prison door is perhaps the saddest and strangest trysting-place in the world. A second disciple of the goddess of love

reminds himself, in terms not altogether unpoetic, of the losses he feels in prison. No more does he enjoy the sweet summer days, and the songs of birds and the fragrance of flowers. In addition to this t he draws a verbal picture of lovers' s in woodland glades, and, in recalling them, he feels lonely and sad at heart. Another prisoner, an Irishman from his name, tells his mate that he has sad news to relate, and inscribes the words "Michael is gone out of his mind." Another has learned while in prison that some one has taken advantage of his absence to do some injury to his wife and children, and he vows vengeance on the wrong-doer in words charged with sulphurous hate. A seeming penitent writes that he is to be released on a certain early date, "and then, by God ——" he concludes. The vow was

never recorded. Fate, in the shape of a warder, snatched the can from his hands ere the promise could be completed.

Such are the tenor and purport of the messages passed from hand to hand in prison. It is, perhaps, the strangest postal system extant. The warders are the postmen, and, instead of postage stamps, the "broad arrow" is the only sign of Her Majesty's approval. The pens are fingernails, or bits of wire, the media of communication are the bottom and sides of skilly and soup-tins. There is scarcely one of all the thousands in the prison which has not its written message upon it. The majority of them are scribbled over and over again until the words thereon are scarcely decipherable. Almost every meal that was served to me in prison was conveyed in a vessel which bore on its

sides the loves and hates, the hopes and fears, the joys and sorrows, the passions, desires, anticipations, plans, resolves of numbers of my fellow-men. I studied them with considerable interest. They interpreted alike the prisoner and his lot.

CHAPTER VIII

DIETARY, ETC.

AS I have stated in the previous chapter, the most heartfelt of all the messages on the tins were those which expressed the longing for what the Americans term "a square meal," and, having experienced prison fare, I am not surprised at the fact. After a day or two's imprisonment, a healthy man begins to feel as though he were all stomach. Against my better self I found myself renouncing the school of Zeno, and turning with longing eyes from the Stoa to the Groves of Epicurus. Visions of food haunted my dreams, and

the memories of meals aforetime enjoyed mocked my desires in the day.

The reason for this condition of things may well be imagined when the dietary table had been read. For the first week I existed (the verb is deliberately chosen) on seven pounds of brown-to-black bread, and ten and a half pints of "stirabout." Nothing else, *absolutely nothing*. I received the bread in eight-ounce portions each morning and evening, and the "stirabout" was served at noon. In the latter was supposed to be three ounces of oatmeal and three ounces of India meal (such as is used to feed fowls upon). In my judgment, the India meal predominated. It arrived in the aforesaid palimpsest tins, and was of the consistency of "stickphast" paste. A fortnight of this "diet"

would kill any man. Its evil influences are recognised by the prison authorities themselves. They never serve it to the long-sentence prisoners. It would scarcely do to rob them of all their strength during the first few days of their incarceration. Under such dietetic conditions the hospital would scarcely be large enough for its inmates, and the medical staff would have to be strengthened. I use this language advisedly. Having myself experienced the full effect of its baneful influences, I cannot sufficiently condemn the present dietary table for short-sentence prisoners. If the object of imprisonment is slow starvation, as well as the punishment of confinement, the damning fact cannot be too widely known. Having first deprived a man of his liberty, it is barbarous, in the highest degree, to use the power thus

obtained over him, to half-starve him to death. After two days of this dietetic treatment he can scarcely stand on his feet. He grows weaker as the days advance. I have seen strong healthy fellows brought down to an almost fainting condition by this iniquitous system. One man I saw in the exercise-yard recurs painfully to my mind in this connection. On the morning of his entrance in the yard he was sunburnt and healthy, and he had the erect carriage of an old soldier of the line. I judged him to have been a bricklayer's labourer before admission, who had probably got a "month" for drunkenness, or some such comparatively trifling offence. At the end of a few days this splendid specimen of humanity was crawling round the exercise-yard, with head bent, and with feet scarcely lifting from

the ground. I venture to ask what moral reform can be produced by a prison system which, receiving a healthy man, discharges him an all but physical wreck? Such procedure must inevitably contribute to the increase of crime. At the conclusion of his sentence the ordinary prisoner is launched upon the world with flaccid muscles and menaced health. Being in this condition he naturally seeks the artificial stimulus of intoxicants, and shirks the manual labour for which he has been absolutely unfitted by the rigours of prison diet and discipline.

Reverting to my own case once more. I rapidly lost flesh, and my strength began to give way. From sitting so long at my task severe pains began to attack me in the side. It felt as though my ribs were pressing upon the intestines. All power

of resistance was gone. Before many days of the "stirabout" and bread-and-water treatment were over, I was compelled to sit at my work with my back to the wall for support. At the end of a week an improvement took place in my dietary. The "stirabout" ceased, and I received an ounce of bread less per day, but as a recompense, had a pint of "skilly" served morning and evening. For dinner I had a menu which ranged from soup to pudding. It must not be imagined that I had more than one course per day. That was a luxury reserved for a longer sentence. My dinner on Sundays and Wednesdays consisted of a 5-oz. loaf and 6-oz. of suet pudding. This latter was of the solidity of putty, and about the colour of burnt-umber. I had good reason to remember that pudding. It

clung tenaciously to the stomach, reminding one of its presence a very long time after the meal was consumed. It was so "sad" and heavy that I think a double portion would have weighed me into the tomb. On Mondays and Fridays we received 8 ounces of potatoes boiled in their skins. My first "dinner" was on a Friday, and as by that time I was ravenously hungry, I actually enjoyed the half-cold and watery vegetables. They were at least a change from the "stir-about," which my stomach had by that time begun to refuse. On Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, we had the felicity of half-a-pint of "soup." It was more like a vegetable hotch-potch than soup. Boiled peas held a predominant, an almost overwhelmingly masterful position in it, and now and then one caught

traces of a stray bit of onion. I was particularly lucky if I managed to find a microscopic thread of meat resembling pork. I am unable to say that it was pork, it might have been, and on second thoughts, probably was, a bit of tinned prairie beef. Anyhow, the soup was well flavoured, and, had it not been so lukewarm, it might have formed, with the bread, an appetising meal.

It is now possible to summarise the amount of food given to a prisoner during (say) a month's imprisonment. In that period he has, in solid food, 26 lbs. 11 oz. of bread, 3 lbs. of potatoes, and 2 lbs. 4 oz. of suet pudding. Of liquid nourishment (save the word) he gets 10½ pints of "stirabout," 4½ pints of soup, and 21 quarts of skilly (*i.e.* boiled meal and water). Beyond these things he receives absolutely nothing.

I am convinced that there is not a single one of my readers who will argue that this is food enough for a healthy man. It will be observed that no milk, meat, or tea is given, and that there is none of those articles provided which are generally associated with a nourishing diet. The staple food is bread and skilly, and, of the latter, one very soon palls. A change in the shape of cocoa three times a week after a nine months' residence in prison is all that is permissible by the prison regulations.

Returning again to my own experiences, bread and salt was the only food which I permanently enjoyed. I even wearied of the soup, but the Arab's token of hospitality remained with me as a source of continuous satisfaction. There came times, however, when even this became less

tasty, especially in and after the third week.

At the end of ten days my vitality was so reduced by the confinement and prison fare, that I began to catch a fresh cold nearly every morning. A north wind was at that time sweeping round the angles of our exercise ground, and it caught my throat, exposed as it was by the lowness of the shirt collar. A dry cough supervened, which troubled me day and night. I began to "sleep" even worse than before. During the whole time I was in prison I never enjoyed a night of unbroken and refreshing sleep. After becoming in part accustomed to the plank-bed, I used to drop off into a kind of troubled slumber at about half-past eight or nine o'clock. Before midnight, however, I was awake, and I spent the

dreary time from then until six o'clock in counting the hours as they struck, and in listening to the muffled tread of the watchmen.

These things soon began to tell on a constitution, never at any time very strong; and before a fortnight was over, I asked to see the doctor. He came to see me in the time set apart for exercise. After a few questions, he sounded my chest with the stethoscope, and, before leaving, gave me some tonic pills. Instead of getting better under this treatment, I grew worse, and after a few days I applied again to see the doctor. "Pill-box" had waited up on me before; this time it was "Laconic." I asked him to allow me to enter the hospital, but beyond another dose of pills he left me as he found me.

By this time I had grown so

physically weak as scarcely to be able to walk round the exercise-yard. At first, the morning walk was a source of pleasure, but now it made me faint and dizzy. I remember well that as I grew weaker, I left the outer circle and entered the slower one inside. There, with eyes half-closed, I followed the other prisoners wearily round. One morning I felt myself stumbling at almost every step, and my senses were so dim that the warders appeared as it were through a "mist" *not* "suffused with tears." My eyeballs ached; I had rest only when I half closed the lids upon them. The sun now began to shine again, but I found it a greater weariness than the aforetime cold winds. I grew hot, feverish, and thirsty, and glad was I when the signal

was given, and we were re-conducted to our cells. Here, stretched upon the cold floor, I snatched a moment's rest before taking up my work again. At the end of the third week, tired, feeble, and thin, with throat tickling and burning with fever, with lungs painful and cough troublesome, with my sides incessantly aching, in the day too tired to sit up, and in the night too wearied to sleep, I once more asked for an interview with the doctor. This time I was introduced to "Mr Fussy." Instead of coming to my cell, as the other members of the medical staff had done, he received me in a kind of dispensary under the central dome. There were several prisoners desirous of seeing the doctor at the same time as I, and in order to prevent us from "communi-

cating" with each other, we were placed about two yards apart, with our faces turned to the wall. I never felt so much like a naughty school-boy as I did on that occasion. One of the warders noticed that I was reading a tabulated list of prisoners in the establishment. It happened to be hanging on the wall exactly in front of me. I was instantly moved up higher. My turn came after a while, and I entered the dispensary. "Fussy" was excessively rude to me. As I have before suggested, I might have been a dog, so imperatively and abruptly did he call me to him. He addressed me with a "Come here;" "Stand there," and other such like phrases. I obeyed, but without the meekness which would

have turned the cheek to the smiter. I detailed my case, laying stress on the weakness of my throat and lungs, and my entire loss of appetite. Standing on tip-toe (he was but a little fellow), he, without washing it, plunged a brass plate into my mouth. While holding my tongue down in this fashion, he examined the larynx. Once more I was stethoscoped, and then sent back to my cell.

From this time to the date of my release, a tall, youthful warder brought me a quantum of medicine three times a day. It acted like a tonic, and restored my appetite. I grew decidedly healthier, took a greater pleasure in exercise, brightened up at the thought of speedy freedom; and when the morning of my liberation came,

I felt stronger than I had been since the first few days of my imprisonment. My restoration to health eventually proved to be more apparent than real. A succession of illnesses followed my release from prison, and it took exactly twelve months of travel and change to shake them off.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

THE summons to leave the prison came at about 6.15 A.M. I gave my cell an extra scrub before leaving. Then, following the instructions of the warder on the previous day, I rolled up my rug and blankets and deposited them in their place on the piece of board in the corner. I next folded my sheets together, and tied them in a bundle with the towel and handkerchief. The numbered label which I had hitherto borne on my breast was left for the next inmate of the cell, and, with cap on head, and linen under arm, I was marched to the line of prisoners waiting to be discharged that morning. My

letters were handed to me here, and for the first time I gleaned news of the outer world. Our names were called over, and then we were marched, once more in Indian file, to the discharge room. Here our boots were taken from us and our own hats served out. We were then weighed, and afterwards received the bundles containing our clothing. Then, locked in miniature cells, we changed our garments, and as we finished this operation we were taken to breakfast. This consisted of the eternal bread and skilly. It was served to us standing. Our valuables were then restored to us. While we were eating our humble fare, one of the prisoners carried on a grumbling talk with one of the warders, but I do not remember at this moment what it was all about. Another,

this time a youth, complained that some pawn-tickets given up on admission had gone astray. A few moments passed (they seemed like ages), and we were at last ushered beneath the prison gates to where freedom and friends awaited us.

Two things struck me particularly on this morning of exit; one pathetic, and the other gaily comic. The first was the arrest of a mere boy as he stepped across the prison threshold; the other was the singing by a prisoner of the old refrain, "Say '*au revoir*' and not 'Good-bye.'" He probably anticipated a speedy return thither. Speaking for myself, and with all due deference to the opinions of those who may be able to claim a greater authority, a month's imprisonment is sufficient to last a lifetime.

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