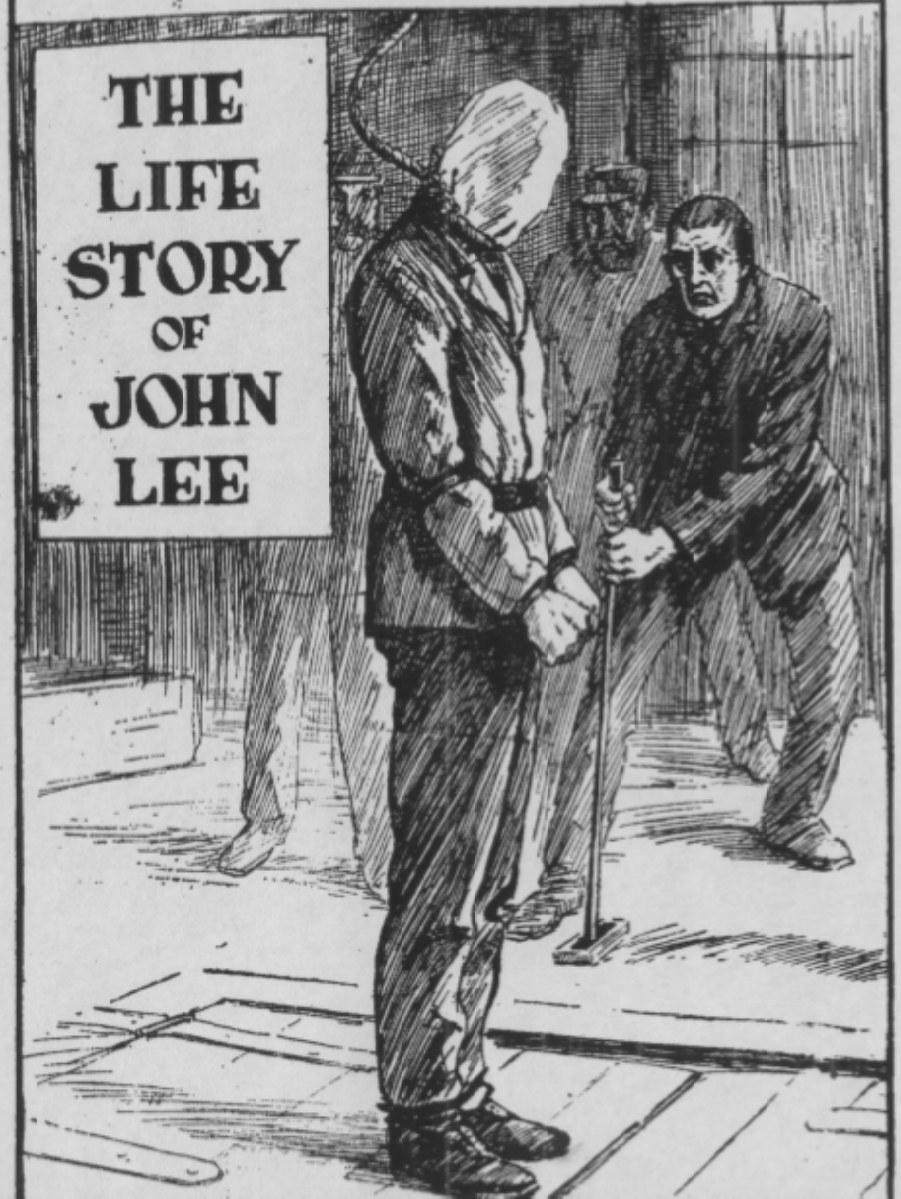
PRICE SIXPENCE.

THE MAN THEY COULD NOT HANG

THE LIFE STORY OF JOHN LEE



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JOHN LEE

AT THE PRESENT TIME

THE MAN THEY COULD NOT HANG.

THE LIFE STORY OF JOHN LEE

("BABBACOMBE LEE.")

TOLD BY HIMSELF.

Published at 17 and 18, Henrietta Street,
London, W.C.

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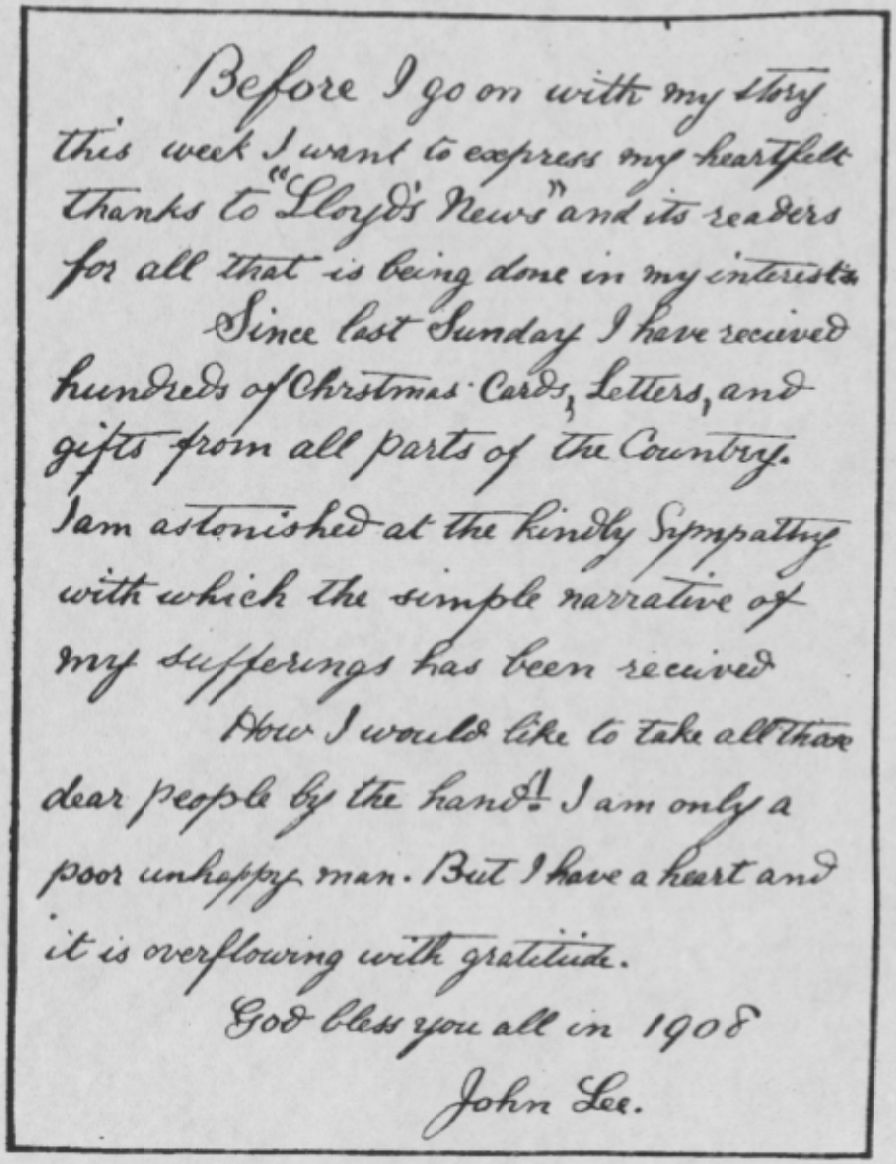
JOHN LEE'S GRATITUDE



Before I go on with my story this week I want to express my heartfelt thanks to "Lloyd's News" and its readers for all that is being done in my interests.

Since last Sunday I have received hundreds of Christmas Cards, Letters, and gifts from all parts of the Country. I am astonished at the kindly Sympathy with which the simple narrative of my sufferings has been received.

How I would like to take all those dear people by the hand! I am only a poor unhappy man. But I have a heart and it is overflowing with gratitude.

God bless you all in 1908

John Lee.

FACSIMILE OF A TOUCHING MESSAGE WRITTEN BY LEE FROM HIS HOME IN DEVON.

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INTRODUCTION.

AT eight o'clock on the morning of the 18th of December, 1907, the iron gates of a prison opened, and out into the light of day stepped two middle-aged men.

One of them was an official in civilian clothes. He bore the hall-marks of drill and discipline. The other man . . . .

The other man! There was something strange about him. He looked hunted and cowed, like a creature crushed and broken. He seemed to hang back as if he were afraid of the light of day. He appeared to draw no happy inspiration from God's sunshine. He fumbled at his overcoat pockets as if the very possession of a pocket was a new sensation. He trod gingerly, as if the earth concealed a pitfall. . . .

Away they went by cab and rail to Newton Abbot. There the two men walked to the police-station, where the official announced that he was a warder from Portland Convict Prison in charge of John Lee, convict, on ticket-of-leave.

John Lee handed his ticket to the police officer, who read it.

What was it that made that policeman start as he read? What was it that made him look so curiously at the tall, thin, clean-shaven, elderly man before him?

It was this: Certain particulars on the ticket showed that on February 4th, 1885, the bearer was sentenced to death at Exeter Assizes for murder at Babbacombe. The man was "Babbacombe" Lee.

"Babbacombe" Lee was on his way to spend Christmas with his aged mother—John Lee, the man they could not hang, the man under whose feet the grim mechanism of the scaffold three times mysteriously failed in its appointed work.

The story of his life's ordeal John Lee himself will tell in the following pages. It is the story of one who, rightly or wrongly, was doomed in the first flush of manhood to a torture more fiendish than the human mind, unaided by the Demon of Circumstance, could have devised. It is the story of a man dangled in the jaws of death, and hurried thence to a living tomb whose terrors make even death seem merciful.

From his terrible ordeal, John Lee emerges with the cry "I am innocent" still on his lips. And who that has suffered will not listen?

THE TRIAL RECALLED.

JUDGE, IN PASSING SENTENCE, WAS PUZZLED BY LEE'S CALM DEMEANOUR.

"THE usual quiet of Babbacombe, a residential suburb of Torquay, and the home of an active fishing industry" (said a local paper on Saturday, November 22nd, 1884), "was very greatly disturbed early on Saturday morning, and the peaceful inhabitants roused to a state of intense alarm and terror, by one of the most frightful tragedies that human devilment could plan or a human fiend could perpetrate."

Miss Emma Ann Whitehead Keyse was the name of the victim. She was an old lady of about sixty-eight, and the name of her home and of the scene of the tragedy was "The Glen."

All was well when the servants retired on the night of November 14th, 1884, leaving Miss Keyse downstairs writing in the dining-room.

About three or four o'clock the next morning they found their mistress lying dead on the dining-room floor. Her throat was horribly cut. There were three wounds on her head, one of which had fractured the skull.

Worse even than that. It was evident that whoever had murdered the old lady had attempted to burn the body! When discovered the corpse was partly charred.

The victim had evidently nearly finished putting on her night-clothes, but these were almost burnt away. Papers soaked with paraffin oil had been laid around the body and fired, but the fire was not allowed to do its dreadful work.

The house, it was said, was also ablaze in four places — the dining-room, the staircase, Miss Keyse's bedroom, and the honeysuckle-room. In the hall outside the dining-room there was a large pool of blood. No money, jewellery, or plate was missing.

Lee, then a lad of twenty, was the only man in the house. He was arrested and tried at Exeter Assizes in February, 1885.

The main points of the trial may be summarised as follows :—

CASE AGAINST LEE.

A very short time before the murder he had used threats against Miss Keyse.

Lee helped Jane Neck, one of the servants, downstairs after the alarm, and on her nightdress where he put his arm around her were marks of blood.

Asked for a hatchet to assist in cutting away burning timber, Lee, "in a very short space of time," brought one that was usually kept in an outhouse.

A bloodstained knife was found in a drawer in the pantry where Lee slept.

In a cupboard near the prisoner's bed was an empty oil can, which should have been nearly full.

There was blood on the hatchet.

Upon the prisoner's socks were hairs corresponding with that of Miss Keyse.

Upon his trousers spots of blood, half obliterated by water.

His shirt was stained with blood on the front.

On the oilcan was a stain of blood, which had trickled down the side, broadening out towards the bottom.

The pool of blood in the hall was five feet nine inches from the door of the pantry.

The prisoner's wages had been reduced from three shillings per week to two shillings.

CASE FOR LEE.

The first thing he said after the discovery of the murder was : "I have lost my best friend."

The murdered woman actually was his best friend.

The blood-marks he made on Jane Neck's nightdress were the result of a wound in his arm caused by his putting his fist through the dining-room window, to let out smoke.

The other stains of blood and marks of oil, traces of hair, etc., were obviously due to the fact that, amongst other things, he helped to carry out the corpse of Miss Keyse.

One doctor at least was not convinced that the hatchet was the instrument with which the blows on the victim's head were struck.

Elizabeth Harris, the cook, was enceinte. Therefore she had a lover. That lover might have concealed himself in the house. It was not suggested that she knew anything about the murder.

Miss Keyse was in the habit of going on to the lawn at night to hear the clock strike.

Miss Keyse always bolted the dining-room window herself.

The murder might have been committed by Harris's lover (whose identity did not transpire), who might have put the knife into the drawer in the pantry in order to cast suspicion on Lee.

As for the threats, they were admitted. But counsel for the defence suggested that men who committed such dreadful murders did not speak about them.

Unfortunately, the law which now enables prisoners to give evidence had not been passed at the time of his trial. Lee did not go into the box.

All through the trial he conducted himself with an air of unconcern that is remembered in Devonshire to-day.

When he came up from the cells to hear the verdict of the jury he is said to have been calmly picking his teeth.

Even the judge was struck by his behaviour, for in passing sentence he said :

"You say you are innocent. I wish I could believe it. You have throughout this case maintained a calm appearance, and at this moment you appear to be calm."

After sentence of death had been pronounced, Lee smiled, and is described as going down the dock stairs to the cells three steps at a time!

THE MAN THEY COULD NOT HANG.

THE LIFE STORY OF JOHN LEE.

CHAPTER I.

HOME AT LAST.

LITTLE did I think when, twenty-three years ago, I heard the judge pronounce the awful words of doom that make the guilty tremble, but never the innocent, that I should ever sit in my mother's kitchen, and once more hold her hand in mine.

There is the old kettle bubbling on the hob just as it used to do when I was a lad. There are the old candlesticks I remember so well. And here are two prizes I won when I was a boy.

The old china dogs on the mantelpiece, the candlesticks bright as ever they were, the teapot on the dresser — how I remember all these things.

Only those who have spent half a lifetime in prison can realise what it is to come home again and find the old, old things even in a kitchen just as they were when one left them.

But all is not as it was. . . . There are faces I look for, but cannot see. I only know that over there in the little village churchyard — I can see it from the window — is a grave where my portrait lies buried in my father's coffin. Mine was the last name he uttered when he breathed his last five years ago.

I suppose I have changed after all these years. I feel old. When I went to prison after my terrible experiences at Exeter I was a young man, and, had I been free, the world would have been before me. And now after all these years I have to face

the world just as if I were a boy again, with no more than a boy's knowledge and experience.

But God is good. From first to last He has not deserted me. I know that in all I undertake I shall have His helping hand. I am not afraid.

I shall need His help more now than ever I did. I have been made to think since I was released that freedom for a man such as I am is a more terrible thing than prison. It is no light task to have to face the world again with a story such as mine to carry about all the years in one's heart.

I want to be alone with my mother, away from the world.

From my window I can see the happy Devonshire village in which I was born. I can see the children playing about the cottage doors. But I cannot echo their gleeful laughter.

To all but my dear old mother I am "Babbacombe" Lee.

Still, things have been made easier for me than I had imagined. I feared there would be no Christian charity anywhere.

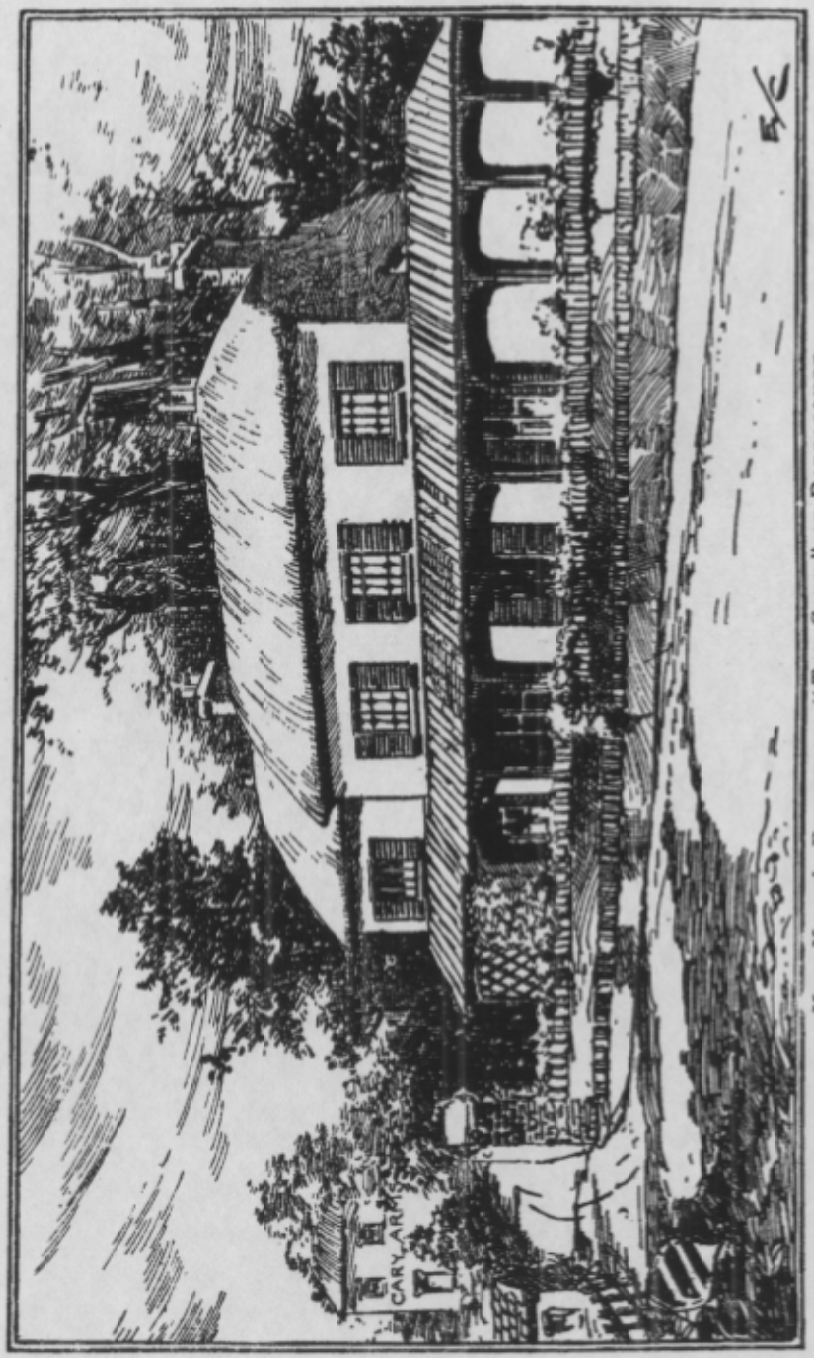
I was mistaken. From everyone I have had kindly greetings. Old playmates have come and taken me by the hand.

The tears are in my eyes now as I think of it. Oh! if I could tell you all that is in my heart. I have stood by my father's grave and wept.

I have been to the church to thank God for all His mercies, to thank Him for watching over my dear mother.

As I watch her now busying herself about the tea-table, as she did years ago, there comes back to my imagination a picture of the fine woman she was when trial and misfortune first entered into our home.

And now she, too, has grown old. But to me she is the same mother, dearer and more precious than ever. She, too, has suffered much. She, too, has been pointed at with the finger of scorn. Only her trust in God and her belief in my innocence have pulled her through. *She knew that I was no murderer.* She knew that the life they tried to take at Exeter was the life of an innocent man.



MISS KEYSE'S RESIDENCE, "THE GLEN," AT BABBACOMBE.

Since the murder the old house—a thatched roofed, two-storey building—has been pulled down and an hotel erected on the site. The centre window on the ground floor is the one where Lee broke the glass and left some skin from his arm remaining.

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The God who protected me on that terrible day has protected her ever since. He has sent her good friends, kind-hearted men and women, who, when the rest of the world was shrinking from her, never once hesitated to draw near to her with consolation and sympathy.

And to think that I should have been the helpless cause of so much sorrow and suffering! I was twenty years old when I was taken away.

I suppose I was nothing but a wild, harum-scarum country boy. Dozens of such boys pass the gate of our cottage every day. I was not a model of virtue. Perhaps had it not been for one false step I might now have been a happy man with a wife and family about my knees. Instead of that——

But let me tell the story from the beginning.

As I sit here by the fire I hear my mother say that I was born in this very village of Abbotskerswell, a little over forty-three years ago. My father used to work in the clay mines about here, but he also farmed a bit of land, so that as villagers go we were in fair circumstances. I can say but little about my childhood. I lived the life of all village children. I played about the fields and lanes, and when I was old enough I went to the village school.

So the years went by. On my fifteenth birthday my father called me to him in the evening and told me that I was now a man, and that all men went to work.

That was a proud day for me. I was going to help my mother.

In a few days I heard of a place at Babbacombe, not many miles from here. An old lady wanted a boy to look after a pony.

I went to Babbacombe. Just by the sea-shore was an old house called "The Glen," and in that house lived the lady who was to be my mistress—Miss Keyse.

I saw her with my mother. She seemed to be pleased with me, so pleased that she engaged me at once. I was to receive three shillings a week.

What a happy day that was for me. If I had only known what was to happen afterwards!

* * * * *

So there I was in my first situation. I had nothing much to do. The pony was about thirty years old, I believe. They told me that it once belonged to my mistress's mother, and that it had been more or less pensioned off for its old age. I had to look after it just as one would nurse some infirm creature. I put it in its stable at night or took it out for exercise. When I was not looking after the pony I was generally going about with Miss Keyse. When she went visiting I used to bring her home at night. I was the boy.

I suppose there are people who would say that I ought to have stuck to my situation. But I wanted to see the world—how was I to do it?

CHAPTER II.

I AM INVALIDED FROM THE NAVY.

I OUGHT to explain to you that Babbacombe was a prosperous fishing village. The place was full of old sailors, who used to tell me queer yarns. All kinds of strange craft used to come and anchor in the bay. They were mostly small trading vessels, but every now and then a big man-of-war—one of the old-fashioned kind—would come in, and then I used to spend whole afternoons on the beach, watching the ships and jack tars.

Time went on, and every day I became more and more fascinated with a new idea that had taken possession of me.

I would be a sailor.

When I had been with Miss Keyse for eighteen months, I went home and told my father that I wanted to join the Navy.

I can remember now how angry he was. I could not even win over my mother. But I was not to be prevented from pursuing the course I had marked out for myself. I got all the necessary papers and asked my father to sign them. His reply was to tear them up in a fit of anger.

Nothing daunted, I went to Newton Abbot and got fresh

papers. This time I was more cautious. I begged and entreated my mother to give her consent. With tears I told her how I had set my heart on the Navy. At last, taking pen and ink, I went to my father in the fields and there and then the papers were signed.

My delight knew no bounds. Off I went to the magistrate, Admiral Cornish Bowden, to get his signature.

"Going to join the Navy, my lad?" he said.

"Yes, sir," I replied, saluting as I had seen the sailors doing at Babbacombe.

"A very good thing," he said.

Away I went with all my papers in order. After saying good-bye to my father and mother I left for Newton Abbot, and thence went to the depôt at Exeter.

At Exeter I met a lot of other boys who had been drafted down from London. In a few days we found ourselves on board the *Circe* at Plymouth — and I was on the way to being a sailor in Her Majesty's Navy.

From the *Circe* I went to H.M.S. *Implacable*, where I remained till I was a first-class boy.

When I left the *Implacable* I carried away with me a prize which is on the table before me now.

It is called "The Bear Hunters of the Rocky Mountains," by Anne Bowman. On the fly-leaf is the following inscription :—

H.M.S. IMPLACABLE,
Xmas, 1880.

Admiralty Prize for general progress.
First prize, first instruction.

Awarded to John Lee.

(*Signed*) *B. Jackson, Commander.*

I had found a profession. I was doing well.

Next I joined the training brig *Liberty*, and was afterwards sent to the *Foudroyant* for gunnery training.

I was now eighteen. In a few months I would have been rated as an ordinary seaman, when a misfortune befel me that was to be the first of a long series of troubles.

I was stricken down with pneumonia, and sent to the Royal Naval Hospital. For some days I lay between life and death till they pulled me through—but at what a price!

The doctors told me that I was no more use to the Navy. I was invalided out. My career was closed. I still possess my discharge paper, setting forth the reason of my discharge, and describing my character as "Very good."

My heart was broken. There seemed to be nothing left for me to do.

At nineteen years of age I made my second start in life. First I got a situation as boots at the Yacht Club Hotel, Kingswear. That I didn't care for, so I thought I would try the railway. I became a porter at Torre station. I had been there only a week when another fatal day dawned in my history.

I ought to have told you that all this time Miss Keyse had been keeping an eye on me. She used to write to me and give me good advice.

You can understand, therefore, how one morning my heart positively leapt for joy when I received a letter from her in which she told me that she had arranged for me to go as footman to Colonel Brownlow at Torquay. I gratefully accepted the offer, entered the colonel's service — and happened on my second great misfortune.

CHAPTER III.

I AM LED ASTRAY.

I HAD not been there many weeks before the family went abroad. There was some talk of taking me, but the arrangement fell through, and I was left at home with the other servants.

At this time one of my friends was a young fellow who was going to Australia. He wanted a few pounds and — well, I was led astray.

In my desire to help him I pawned some of the family plate. By means of the crest the theft was traced to me. I was apprehended, and sent to Exeter for trial.

God help me! I had done wrong. I don't complain of my punishment. But I can't help thinking that in those days they were less merciful than they are now. In the eyes of the world I was a thief. The world had no mercy upon me.

I well remember the trial. I remember someone asking me if I was guilty.

"Guilty!" I said at once. I wanted to tell the truth.

My characters were handed up to the Bench, and, I suppose, they looked at them. Perhaps they didn't, for the magistrate said: "Six months' hard!" and I was hurried away to prison.

It was my first offence. But no one took that into consideration. My mother and sister were waiting outside in the hall to speak to me. They were not even told that my case was on. They didn't even know that I had been sentenced till my solicitor went out and told them!

There was no idea of reforming offenders in those days. They were simply punished.

I served my sentence in Exeter gaol.

The chaplain was the Rev. John Pitkin—the very man I was afterwards to meet under circumstances more terrible than I could have imagined.

I used to clean up his office whilst I was in prison. I also looked after the officers' bedrooms, and in my spare time I did a little mat-making.

I had been waiting three months for trial, but I was made to serve the full six months in Exeter. I came out of prison in January, 1884.

What was I to do? For the second time I was flung on to the world, but this time with a load that threatened to crush me.

Once again a hand was near to help me. My kind old friend, Miss Keyse, had written to the governor of the prison, asking for my character. As soon as she received it she wrote to me at Abbotskerswell, and asked me to go and see her.

Accompanied by my sister Millie, I went over to Babbacombe one afternoon and had a long talk with Miss Keyse.

I have often thought of that day since. She was so kind to me; she seemed to be more gracious than ever.

After she had spoken to me she sent me to the vicar. In the end I was taken back into the household at "The Glen." The engagement was only a temporary one. But I was none the less grateful. It enabled me to make a fresh start in life.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCES.

I NOW come to the saddest chapter of my story.

Fate, I suppose, had ordained that one more scene should complete the first act of my life-long tragedy. The Babbacombe murder was that scene.

The newspapers have called me "Babbacombe" Lee. I do not complain. The world has fastened upon my shoulders a load that I shall never be able to shake off. That terrible name will, I suppose, haunt me and mine for many a long day.

But let me say this, let me write it in letters of blood if so be it can be written no other way: *I did not murder Miss Keyse!*

Outcast as I am, doomed perhaps to wander about the earth like a leper, that cry shall be heard wherever I go. I swear again: *I did not kill Miss Keyse.*

When I went into the service of Miss Keyse, on coming out of Exeter, there were in the house, besides my mistress, Eliza and Jane Neck, two old servants who had been with Miss Keyse forty or fifty years; Elizabeth Harris, my step-sister, the cook. I did the odd jobs or waited at table.

Where the house used to stand I believe there is now a large hotel. It was a rambling house. It stood right on the coast not far from the sea. They used to drag the boats up in front of it.

On the ground floor there was a conservatory, a drawing-room, a dining-room, a pantry, and a kitchen.

Upstairs there was Miss Keyse's writing-room and a bedroom they used to call the Queen's room, because the Royal yacht once put in at Babbacombe, and the room was prepared for Queen Victoria in case she wanted it.

However, only Prince Albert came ashore. The sea was too rough for the Queen to land. Prince Albert walked up through the grounds attached to "The Glen," and afterwards drove to Torquay.

That, of course, was not in my time. But I was told all about it, and how all the way to Torquay the men who drove the Prince kept shouting, "The Queen's at Babbacombe!"

I also remember being told by my step-sister that whilst I was in the Navy, the present King, who was then Prince of Wales, paid Miss Keyse a visit at Babbacombe.

Miss Keyse was, I believe, a maid of honour to Queen Victoria.

On the occasion of that visit the Prince, as he then was, gave each of the servants half-a-sovereign.

Besides the Queen's bedroom, there was one occupied by the Necks, and another by Harris, who could get to her room either by the front door or by the back. Miss Keyse's bedroom was a small room near Harris's. I slept in the pantry.

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About the pantry I must say this. It was not built for a bedroom, but there was a folding bed in it.

This could be closed up when not in use, and run up against the wall, so that it looked like a chest of drawers.

At night I used to pull it down — and there was my bed all complete.

Such was the household at "The Glen." We were all quite happy.

At this time I was walking out with a girl named Katie Farmer, whom I had known for about six months. For the sake of Katie I was very ambitious. Miss Keyse, of course, had been very kind to me, but I was anxious to get something better to do, and I felt very unsettled. My mistress had told me I could go into the Army, and if I did she said she would get her friends to promote me.

I want to make it plain that I had no quarrel with anyone. Several people have said that I made use of threats. That is absurd. I may have said foolish things when I was in the dumps, but God knows that I never wished harm of any kind to Miss Keyse. Indeed, I had every reason to pray that she would be spared to me for many a long year. She was a dear old lady.

It is so easy to take a wrong view of a man's words or actions. They are, perhaps, half noticed at the time. Afterwards, when it becomes important to remember them, they are dug up out of the past. And then imagination is called in to supply the details that have vanished in the meantime. This is the explanation of many of my so-called "threats."

CHAPTER V.

THE FATAL NIGHT.

AND so I come to November 14, 1884.

The first thing I distinctly remember is seeing my step-sister, Elizabeth Harris, going to her bedroom. It was teatime.

As she looked queer I asked her what was the matter. She said she didn't feel well.

"Shall I fetch Dr. Chilcote?" I said.

She replied, rather shortly I thought, "Oh, no, no!"

I was afterwards told she was in bed. At all events, I did not see her for the rest of that day.

At seven o'clock I went to the post, as was my duty every day. Then I went round to see Miss Farmer, and at ten o'clock I returned to "The Glen." After supper I went in to prayers with Eliza and Jane Neck. Miss Keyse said the prayers.

It was always a touching little service. I shall never forget the picture—old Miss Keyse reading the prayers and a chapter from the Bible.

In a quarter of an hour the prayers were said, and at eleven o'clock I went to bed in the pantry. The other two servants didn't go just then.

Jane was in the pantry putting away some things. She used to go about her work, although I was asleep, or, perhaps, getting into bed. She never worried about me.

Miss Keyse never used to go to bed till one or two o'clock in the morning.

I think Jane Neck stayed up for about half-an-hour. The last thing she did was to put a cup of nib cocoa on the kitchen hob for our mistress. This was done every night. Miss Keyse used to go into the kitchen herself and carry the cocoa up to her bedroom.

On this particular night I think I was asleep before Jane had finished. But I do know that Miss Keyse had told Jane to tell me that there was a note in the pantry for me to take to Colonel McLean's in the morning, with a brace of pheasants. Miss Keyse often left notes like that, and I attended to them in the morning.

The next thing I remember is being roused up before daybreak by my step-sister shouting "Fire! Fire!"

I jumped out of bed and put on my shirt, socks, and trousers At the top of the stairs I saw the three women. The house was full of smoke. Eliza Neck was shouting: "Where's Miss Keyse? Where's Miss Keyse?"

We rushed into Miss Keyse's bedroom. The old lady was not there.

Terror-stricken, Eliza Neck went running about the rooms upstairs, but there was no sign of Miss Keyse.

I could see flames coming out of my mistress's room, and also out of another room.

Eliza was the first to go into the dining-room. Jane and I waited outside. The smoke was so thick that I could hardly see her.

I heard Jane call out, "We shall all be stifled!"

Realising the danger I rushed headlong into the dining-room in order to open the windows. I tried to open the French window on the right, but I couldn't.

So I pushed my arm through the glass.

I cut my arm and left a bit of flesh on the pane. I could feel the blood pouring down my sleeve and soaking it. But what did that matter?

I little thought that afterwards my fate would practically turn on that trivial circumstance.

The smoke was now pouring out of the room, and we looked about us.

"Oh! Where is Miss Keyse?" I heard one of the women say.

As she spoke I looked round.

CHAPTER VI.

I AM ARRESTED ON SUSPICION.

My mind recoils with horror as I think of it.

There, spread out on the floor before me, was the answer to the cry.

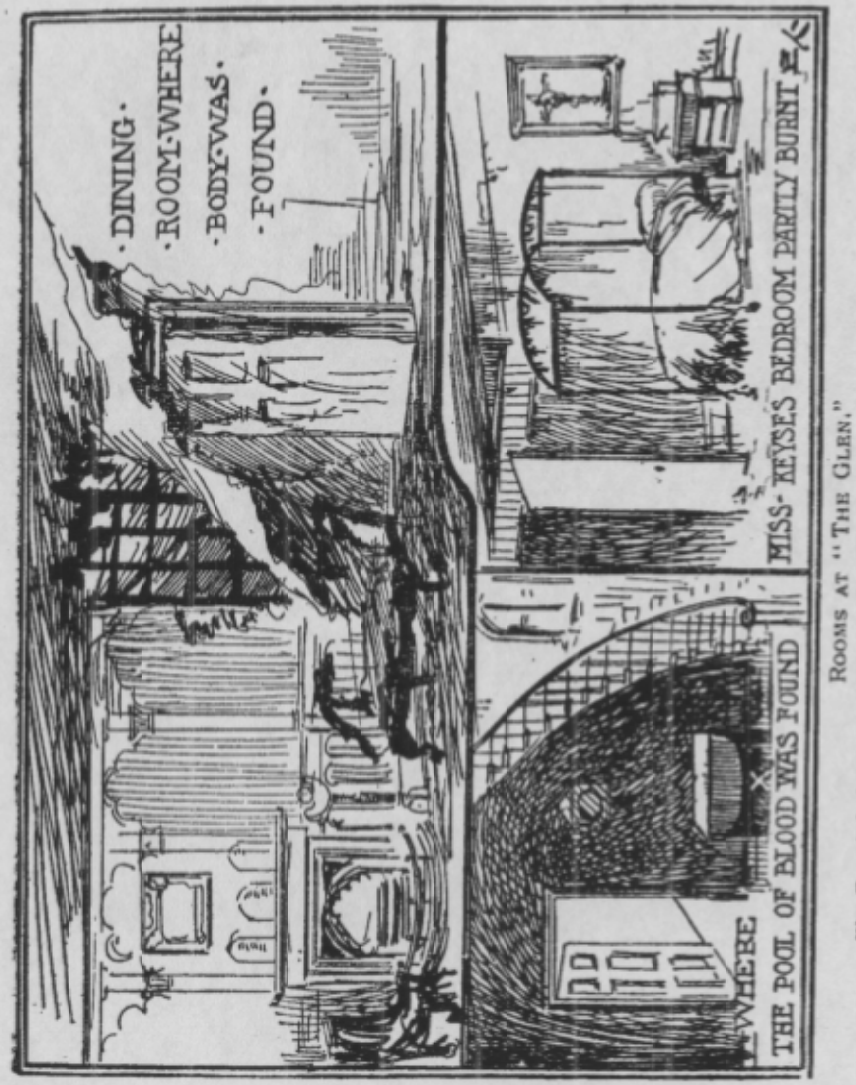
My poor dear mistress was lying on the carpet — a ghastly sight.

I can see her eyes staring out from the hair which had fallen about her face.

I can still see her hands. They were blue and "clawlike" —drawn up in the convulsions of death.

I just took one glance at the body and went out.

Jane and I at once called a man named Stiggins, who was



ROOMS AT "THE GLEN."

Miss Keyse's body was found near the charred remains of the sofa in the dining room.

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living in one of Miss Keyse's cottages on the beach. He was a fisherman.

Then I went back to the house. I remember that we also called Mr. Gaskin, the landlord of the Cary Arms. Several other people came as well.

I went back to the dining-room. The smoke had now gone.

Miss Keyse was lying by the sofa. There was blood on her throat. The body looked as if an attempt had been made to burn it, but I did not notice any paper about or oil.

With the assistance of Mr. Gaskin I carried the body outside. Nearly all the clothes had been burnt off it. Mr. Gaskin lifted her by the head, and I took her by the feet.

Next I remember that I went back into the dining-room, and helped to put out the fire.

The people in the house wanted someone to go and break the news to Colonel McLean. I was sent.

I ran all the way to the house in Torquay, and threw some gravel up at the servant's window.

After the gravel had been rattling against the panes for several moments the window was thrown up and a servant put out her head.

"There's been a fire at Miss Keyse's," I said. "Tell Mrs. McLean I want her."

I was admitted into the hall, and presently I saw Mrs. McLean standing on the top of the landing.

"Miss Keyse's place has been on fire," I told her, "and the poor old lady is badly burnt."

On my way back to "The Glen," I met the chimney sweep. I think I also called a policeman.

At the trial something was said about an axe. It is quite true that I was asked for one when they were putting out the fire. They wanted to chop down a beam.

I went out to the woodhouse and got the axe I knew would be there.

How quickly that terrible morning passed!

I never stopped to think of the awful significance of it all for me.

Still less did I pause to recollect that on the night before the tragedy, *I was the only man in the house!*

As soon as things got a bit quiet I wanted to go to the doctor to get my arm dressed. By that time my shirt was soaked with blood.

At the door of "The Glen" there was a policeman. I told him where I was going.

Holding up a hand he said: "You can't go there alone. I must go with you."

I protested strongly against such absurd treatment. The real meaning of it did not dawn on me.

However, the policeman went to the superintendent, and asked him if he was to go with me to the surgery.

"No," said the superintendent. "Let him go himself."

After my arm had been dressed I went back to the house, and sat down with the firemen in the kitchen.

Suddenly the superintendent called me to him.

"Lee," he said, "you will be apprehended on suspicion."

I said, "On suspicion?—Oh!"

I was too astonished to say anything else.

He answered, "*You are the only man in the house!*"

Almost dazed, I was handed over to the sergeant. I could hardly speak. I could not think. My tongue was tied.

As I was going through the kitchen my step-sister, Elizabeth Harris, said to me:

"Where are you going to?"

I said, "I am taken on suspicion."

She answered, "I know you didn't do it!"

As I left the house for Torquay police-station I heard Mr. Gaskin say that "something foul" had been done.

* * * * *

That is all I know about the murder of Miss Keyse.

I take Almighty God as my judge—I have spoken the truth.

Miss Keyse was my best friend.

She was like a mother to me. She would have done anything for me.

I well remember her one day speaking to me because I had gone out with Miss Farmer instead of going to church.

"John, I am so sorry you didn't go to church," she said, in her sweet, gentle voice. "We had such a nice sermon."

And then she went on to talk about my first great trouble. "If only," she said, "you could have seen your poor father and mother when they came to me when you got into trouble, you would go along straight."

I can tell you that the tears came into my eyes as I listened to her.

And that is the woman they say I murdered.

CHAPTER VII.

RECOLLECTIONS OF MY TRIAL.

THE two scenes which I shall now describe to you are my trial and attempted execution. But first there are certain things I must say in order to put myself right with my fellow men, in order to ensure myself that share of justice which is the common heritage of us all. Two charges are being made against me: First, that I intend to question the verdict of the jury. Second, that I make a direct claim to Divine intervention on my behalf when I stood on the scaffold in 1885.

There seem to be certain people in this world who derive pleasure from oppressing the outcast. There is no suffering possible to the human heart but they multiply it by all sorts of unworthy means. There will perhaps come to these people a moment when they too will stand on the brink of destruction. In that time they will remember how they pursued an unhappy man who has suffered during twenty-three years agony unthinkable. May they obtain more mercy than they have shown me. May they at least be finally forgiven.

I do not question the verdict of the jury. On the evidence that was placed before them they could have come to no other conclusion than that I was guilty. Whatever I may think about some of the witnesses, I do not complain about my trial. His Majesty's judges are beyond suspicion. No jury would wickedly send a man to his death. What I do complain about is that even before I was tried, and even whilst I was being tried, the malice that was shown by certain writers and other individuals was

disgraceful. To all these people I again say: May more mercy be shown to you than you showed to me.

As for my wonderful escape from death—for they tried three times to execute me and failed—I have only one thing to say. If it be true that the Divine will is manifest in everything that happens; if it be true that not even a leaf can fall or a sparrow perish without God's knowledge, then I say that Heaven, and Heaven alone, spared me on that terrible morning. God does not always send an angel with a flaming sword. The planks of the scaffold may have swollen with rain. The carpenter may have bungled his task. My deliverance could have been effected that way just as well as any other, through that carpenter, through that executioner.

* * * * * *

I do not propose to say very much about my trial or about the events which immediately preceded it. They interested me but little. I knew that I was innocent. Besides, I was just a rough country lad of twenty. What did I know about trials? What do I know about them now?

A trial is a thing so bewildering that it seems to be nothing but one long jumble of words, till suddenly the jury says "Guilty!" and the judge passes sentence. I often think that the Law ought to recognise this. But unfortunately the Law only knows crime and its punishment. It takes no count of the man.

Let me put you in the dock for a moment just as I was put in the dock. You are wearied and worn after many weeks of confinement, of hurryings to and fro between police-stations, gaols, police-courts, and coroner's inquests. You look tired, pale, and thin. "Ah!" says the Law: "Your guilty conscience is wearing you out!" You tremble with nervous excitement. You are full of suspense. Your hand shakes. Your voice quivers as you speak. "Aha!" says the public, watching your every movement. "Wretch, you are afraid! Your crime is overwhelming you!" But if by some wonderful chance you are able to preserve your fortitude; if the knowledge that you are innocent comes to your rescue and braces you up; if you betray no emotion; if you smile—what then? "Wretch! wretch!"

is the cry. "Only the author of so diabolical a murder as this could show such wonderful calm and indifference!"

This is what happened in my case. Since my release I have turned up many of the accounts of my trial, and they all note my unruffled bearing. In some cases the accounts of my conduct are exaggerated.

Whatever I did, can anyone tell me why I should have behaved like a coward?

Immediately after I had been arrested I was marched all the way to Torquay police-station in front of a policeman. No crowd accompanied me. I was not handcuffed. I simply trudged along as if I were bent upon some errand. Behind me was the sergeant. I made no attempt to escape. I wanted to see the whole business through from beginning to end. I had nothing to be afraid of. In a sense I was quite happy.

When we got to Torquay I was formally charged, and put into a cell. As I heard the door clang upon me my heart sank. For a second time I was within prison walls. I sat down, my head in my hands, and strove to realise what had befallen me. Theft I had already suffered for. I was now charged with murder!

I have no more than a dim recollection of my appearance before the magistrates and the coroner. I remember being taken to the coroner's inquiry on the Monday following the discovery of the murder. The inquest was held at the Town Hall, St. Mary Church. It lasted for two or three days, but I don't think I went every day. When I did go I was taken in a cab, and always early in the morning, so as to avoid the crowd that was waiting to see me.

One little thing did happen during the coroner's inquiry which serves to show I was judged and condemned even before the evidence had been heard. A postman named Richards was called to give evidence about a certain threat that I was supposed to have uttered. When he had given the evidence a juryman said it was a pity the postman had not at the time told others about the threat, so that life might have been saved! I cannot think of anything more calculated to prejudice my case. I am glad, however, to say that the coroner did me the justice of pulling

that juryman up and reminding him that it was too soon to come to such a conclusion.

I remember another occasion at the police-court on which my solicitor, Mr. Templer, wished to correct a statement which was being made by Mr. Isidore Carter, the solicitor for the prosecution. To my utter astonishment Mr. Templer was not allowed to make that correction. Again and again we protested against such gross treatment, but the chairman of the magistrates would not so much as listen to him. It must be plain to anybody that on such an occasion it is absolutely necessary to stop the creation of a false impression. But the magistrate refused me even that piece of common justice.

Then I was annoyed a great deal by artists sketching me. I particularly remember one man sitting at a table just below me. He kept looking up at me and making notes with a pencil. He worried me so much that at last I sent a note down to Mr. Templer, and he made a protest to the magistrates. What do you think they did? They called for the artist's sketch-book, and looked at his sketches. Instead of protecting me they praised him. I suppose I didn't matter. I was only the prisoner. I didn't count.

Scant as was the consideration I received from many people who ought to have known better, I received many little favours during those dark dreary days. I am speaking now for the first time for twenty-three years, and I want to take this opportunity of publicly thanking the police, and especially the two Babbacombe officers, for their kindness to me. Wherever they are I would like them to know how I appreciated many a little thing they did when men who ought to have been an example to others were making my agony harder to bear. The police had an unpleasant duty to perform. Acting under directions, they had to build up the case against me. At the same time they did not forget that I was flesh and blood like themselves. They always made me comfortable. They shielded me from the crowds that waited for me whenever I appeared in public. I thank them most heartily.

About the beginning of December, 1884, all these preliminary proceedings ended. On the 12th I was taken to Exeter

to await my trial. I believe thousands of people were waiting for me at the railway stations. They did not see me. Instead of taking me by train, the police drove me to Exeter in a carriage, and I was in my cell for several hours before anyone knew I had arrived. There I remained till the morning of my trial, February 1st, 1885.

For the world at large such a morning is full of bustle and excitement; for the prisoner it is one of almost distressing quiet. The weather was miserable. It rained without ceasing. Yet I heard that the doors of the court were besieged by crowds anxious to be present at the trial, whilst many persons stood for hours in the rain in case there was anything to be seen.

I heard that only those provided with signed passes were allowed to enter the court. There were policemen on duty at all the doors, and I remember someone telling me that much of their time was occupied in refusing to accept the bribes that were offered them by people who wanted to come in to see me. Hundreds of people would have paid ten shillings just to be allowed to stand in the court. My mother has since told me that they actually barred her way when she applied for admission. Poor mother! She had not provided herself with a ticket, and when she got to the door of the court the police told her that she couldn't enter without a pass. "But I'm John Lee's mother," she replied, angrily, "and pass or no pass I'm going to be near my boy when they try him." At last they let her in, and for three days she sat in that court, from the beginning to the end of the proceedings.

On the Saturday afternoon before the trial I had a visit from Mr. Templer's brother. He told me that Mr. Templer was too ill to look after my trial, but that he, the brother, would be present in court.

"Shall I have anything to say, sir?" I asked him.

"No," he replied. "Don't say a word. I'll get you off all right."

CHAPTER VIII.

I AM SENTENCED TO DEATH.

WHEN the hour appointed for the trial drew near I was removed to the court, which was a short distance from the prison. The governor came into my cell and told me to follow him. We went into the prison yard where a carriage was waiting. Into this we got, and we were driven out of the prison to the court. We drove a long way round, with the result that the crowd that had gathered in the hope of seeing me was completely tricked. Prisoners were usually taken from the gaol to the court in the Black Maria. The carriage was used as the governor was very anxious that there should be no scene in the streets.

When we reached the court I was put into a cupboard-like cell below the court-room. Above me I could hear the hum of people as they were taken to their seats. Suddenly all was silent. A key turned in a lock. Someone came into the little cell in which I was sitting.

"Come along, Lee," he said.

I was led up some steps, and before I knew it I was in the dock.

Before I could recover my self-possession some one was asking me if I was guilty. That brought me to my senses. My courage came back.

"Not guilty, sir," I said, boldly.

Everybody seemed to be waiting to hear what I would say. Before I spoke all was quiet as the grave. The moment I said, "Not guilty," a great buzz of conversation broke out till some one roared "Silence!" Then all was still again.

The judge was Justice Manisty. I had never seen a judge before. He did not seem to be so terrible as I imagined he would be. His robes made him look imposing. But he seemed to be a kind old man. I was defended by Mr. St. Aubyn, M.P., and I think Mr. Collins, Q.C., prosecuted. I did not know any one

else in court except the witnesses, and they were ordered to wait outside. There were several people on the bench. I particularly noticed the sheriff in his uniform.

There is no need for me to go over all the story of the trial. It confused me. I got tired of listening to the long speeches. I wearied of what seemed to be the endless repetition of the story of the murder. I just wanted to know the end of it all. Some of the jury were objected to by Mr. St. Aubyn and had to leave the box. He told me he had heard that they had been talking about the case.

As I have said before, I do not complain of my trial. The case seemed to be so black against me that I cannot blame the jury for finding me guilty.

But there is one thing I want to explain. What the prosecution practically said was this: "How is it, if you are innocent, that you did not hear the person who committed the murder moving about? The pool of blood in the passage was five feet from your bed in the pantry. You must have heard the blows struck that knocked the poor old lady down. You must have heard the murderer going about the house. You must have heard the matches being struck that lighted the fires which nearly destroyed all traces of the crime. How is it you heard nothing of these things?"

Let me reply to these questions by reading you a newspaper paragraph I cut out the other day:—

BARRACK ROOM TRAGEDY.

Gunner Charles Billington, a native of Bristol, was found lying partially on his bed in a barrack-room in Dover Castle with his head nearly severed from his body, as if with a razor. Companions were sleeping on each side of him, but they heard nothing during the night.

These men heard nothing. Neither did I.

I always have been a heavy sleeper. At the time of the murder of Miss Keyse I was a particularly healthy boy. I always slept well, so well that though the Necks very often used to be up late at night working in the pantry where I slept, they never woke me up. I believe they even used to shuffle along between my bed and the cupboard where the oil-can was and yet not disturb me.

I say again that I slept soundly whilst every blow in that terrible murder was being struck, whilst all the other deeds that were afterwards discovered were being done.

I don't think enough was made of this point at the trial.

Here is another point. What was it that brought Miss Keyse downstairs to her death?

It was proved at the trial that she went into the kitchen before going to bed; that she there took her cocoa from the hob, where one of the Necks had left it; that she next went upstairs carrying the cocoa and a candle; that she undressed and put on her night-clothes; that she came down again candle in hand.

What was it that brought her downstairs?

If I had wished to murder her I could have done so whilst she was sitting alone in the dining-room writing after the servants had gone to bed. Or I could have done it upstairs.

I ask again: What was it that brought her downstairs? I think everybody will agree with me that this is a most important point. Unfortunately it was not gone into, and it is too late to discuss it now.

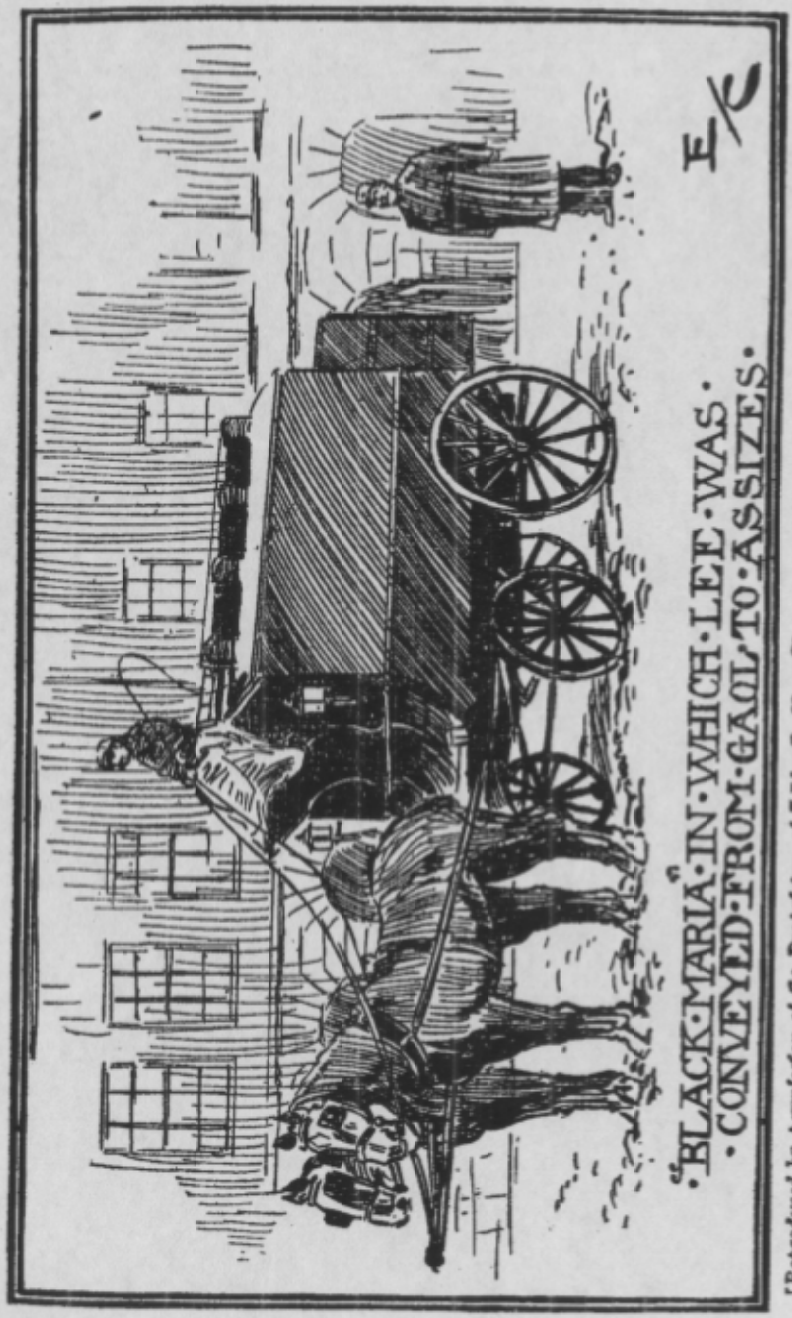
The trial lasted three days. At the end of each day I was taken back to my cell in Exeter Prison. On the second or third morning I went to the Court in a carriage, just as I did with the Governor on the first. But on one morning, I don't know which it was, I went in the Black Maria. I suppose the crowd had discovered the trick. During the adjournments each day I took my meals at the Court.

A silly story got abroad to the effect that during one of these intervals I stood at one of the windows so that the people could see me, and twisted the window cord round my neck.

* * * * * * *

Shall I ever forget the last day of the trial? It was Wednesday. All the speeches were over. The judge had summed up. The jury had left the Court to consider their verdict.

As soon as they left I was taken below. I remember as I



"BLACK MARIA" IN WHICH LEE WAS CONVEYED FROM GAOL TO ASSIZES.

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left the dock how the people gazed at me. They were watching, I supposed, for some sign of fear or guilt. They were disappointed.

As I sat alone beneath the court I could hear the people talking overhead. Then as before came the sudden hush. Once more a key turned in a lock. Once more I was taken back to the dock.

The jury had been absent about half-an-hour. At last I was to hear my fate.

I have heard that this is the most terrible of all moments. It is, of course, a moment of awful suspense. The jury are filing slowly into the box. Everybody is watching them to detect if possible some sign of the secret they hold in their hearts. Is it to be "Guilty" and death, or "Not Guilty" and freedom?

For my part I was as calm as ever. "Courage, John," I said to myself. "You are in Heaven's hands."

I was standing at the dock rail waiting for the foreman to speak. At my back were several warders. You could have heard a pin drop.

"Guilty!"

* * * * * * *

Some one asked me if I had anything to say. Yes, I had. I remember the words to this hour.

Holding myself erect I replied manfully: "I say that I am innocent, sir!"

Then the judge put on the black cap.

How strange he looked—how severe!

I felt the warders come closer to me.

I forget what the judge said. There was something about "place of execution . . . hanged by the neck . . . dead . . . buried within the prison . . . soul."

That was all I heard. It seemed as if some far-away voice was speaking to me.

Some one behind me gently took hold of my arm. But I had no need of support. I was wondering what would happen next, when a warder touched me on the shoulder. "This way," he said.

I turned to go, but as I turned a sudden inspiration seized me.

Stepping quickly to the rail of the dock I looked straight at the judge and said :

"The reason why I am so calm is that I trust in the Lord and He knows I am innocent!"

What had I to be afraid of? I was not afraid to meet Almighty God.

True, my life had been sworn away. I will never believe any more witnesses. All the same, I forgive the Necks. I even forgive my step-sister.

No, I was not afraid. I believe I left the dock with a smile on my face.

I went down to the cells without assistance.

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE CONDEMNED CELL.

As soon as the trial was over I was taken back to Exeter prison, and placed in a condemned cell to wait for Death. Up to this point I had been wearing my own black suit. But I was now made to change it for prison clothes. They were brought to me by two warders as soon as I got back from the trial. The governor came into the cell with the warders. "Change your clothes, Lee," was all he said. I put on the prison clothes, and one of the warders took away my black suit.

When I had made the change the governor left and the warder returned. He came into the cell and shut the door.

The moment he did so I entered upon a fresh ordeal. Two warders never left me night or day for three weeks!

I soon found out that the conditions under which I was to live now were slightly different from the life of an ordinary prisoner. I was on hospital diet. I could have practically what I wanted.

My cell was a much roomier apartment than that in which the ordinary prisoner is accommodated.

At Exeter prison, when I was there, I think there were two condemned cells. Mine was furnished with a bed—not the miserable

plank used in the ordinary cells. There was a table, three chairs, and a few books, amongst them a Bible.

There were besides the ordinary utensils that are to be found in a convict's cell. Of course, I was not allowed the use of a knife at my meals.

Neither did I shave. The result was that I grew a short, stubbly beard, which I did not at all like.

For a day or two I was not very well. I had caught a bad cold and felt a bit down, but I ate and slept splendidly. I soon became used to the continual presence of the warders.

It is always said that these three weeks waiting for death are more terrible than the actual execution. It may be so in some cases, it certainly was not so in mine. If anything I felt relieved. All the suspense was over. I knew now what to expect, and I made up my mind to face it as cheerfully as I could.

My only anxiety was to know when the sentence was to be carried out. This news I received two days after I had been sentenced.

About half-past seven in the morning the governor came into my cell. I had just got out of bed and was washing my hands.

"Lee," he said, "your sentence will be carried out on the 23rd!"

I turned round and smiled.

I suppose I horrified him, for he said, in a very shocked voice :

"It is nothing to laugh at."

Neither was it. But I was happy. His news did not at all frighten me. I was no murderer. I was innocent. What had I to fear?

* * * * * * *

The three weeks soon went. Each day was like the one that preceded it. I chatted with the warders, and went out for exercise. I did not smoke.

I used to receive letters from all parts of the country. There was one from some Brotherhood. I forget what it was about, but somebody in the prison had scribbled on the letter : "Confess, dear brother, confess!"

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I used to receive letters from all parts of the country. There was one from some Brotherhood. I forget what it was about, but somebody in the prison had scribbled on the letter : "Confess, dear brother, confess!"

People were always asking me to confess. I used to say: "If I tell a lie, you'll believe me. If I tell you the truth, you won't believe me." Had I said I was guilty, they would have believed me in a moment.

I believe the chaplain of Exeter Prison, Mr. Pitkin, has said at one time or another I made use of threats.

This is not true. Let me tell you where I think he got the notion from. You must know that one of the two warders always laid down beside me when I went to bed. The other would sit in a chair. One night I was awake. I looked out. There were my two friends asleep!

In the morning I said to them: "You're a nice pair to be looking after a man. If I were dangerous, I could have broken a leg off that table and knocked out your brains!"

Now that is probably where the story about the threats has come from. What I said may have been reported to the chaplain—and I suppose the words were altered a little on the way. Violence? One of them used to stick his knife in the cell door, so that he could hang up his coat! I wonder how many times I could have crept out of bed and got at that knife.

But I never thought of murder. Still less did I contemplate suicide.

During the time I was waiting for execution I was guarded by four warders, two for the day time and two for the night. They were as kind to me, I suppose, as circumstances would permit, but their continual presence was not exactly cheerful.

I wrote three letters from the condemned cell—to my mother, to my father, and to Miss Farmer, my old sweetheart. I put a lock of hair in each.

I don't think Miss Farmer ever received her letter. I imagine it was kept back in case it might be useful after the execution, for I think I told her that I deserved hanging for being so foolish as "to let things go" as I had done.

This is what has been called "a confession," I believe!

I was also visited by my father and mother. I believe mother asked if she could have my body after the execution;

but, of course, that was impossible. Before she saw me the chaplain took her into a room, and they prayed together.

Poor old mother She was just as brave in those days as she has been since.

These visits were at once sources of joy and of pain. My mother bore up well, but my father was almost broken-hearted. As soon as he saw me he said, with tears in his eyes: "Oh, Jack! Jack! I only wish I could die for you. If only they would take me instead." I tried to comfort him all I could by appearing to be cheerful, but it was very hard for us all.

Two warders were always present at these visits, but they used to take as little notice of us as possible.

I shall never forget saying good-bye to my parents for what I thought was the last time. We talked of the old days, of the days when I was in the Navy. I told them not to be afraid; that their John was innocent.

Several clergymen also came to the prison on the Saturday before the execution to see me; but on the advice of the governor, I only saw one of them, the then vicar of Abbotskerswell, Mr. Hind.

The governor told me I could see them all if I liked, but he suggested that I should only see the vicar of my own parish of Abbotskerswell.

I had an idea that the authorities had sent these gentlemen to me in the hope of getting a confession. If one failed the other could try. But I had committed no crime. How could I make a confession?

I did not ask for any reprieve. I sent a statement to the Home Secretary, informing him that I was innocent, and I understand that another petition was got up by my friends. Not for a moment did I expect a favourable answer. I was resigned to my fate. I was not afraid.

There was another petition sent round to collect money to pay for my trial. My father told me that my defence cost £60. This petition, I believe, was fairly successful.

I took as much exercise every day as I could in the prison yard. I never saw anything of the other prisoners. Indeed, I

never saw anybody in the yard besides the warders, except on the last Sunday, when there was a little man walking up and down.

"Who's that?" I asked.

The warders looked at me rather curiously, and one of them answered carelessly:

"Oh, that's a visitor."

A visitor! I may have been a country bumpkin, but I was not a fool.

I guessed who the "visitor" was. "That's the executioner," said I to myself, "looking at me to see how much drop I shall want."

This yard was, of course, not the one in which I was to be executed. Of that I had as yet seen nothing.

* * * * * * *

And now I come to the eve of the execution, Sunday, February 22nd, 1885. I had written my letters. I had done with all worldly ties. Late at night I received the Sacrament, and composed myself for my last sleep on earth, the last before the long, peaceful sleep of death.

And whilst I slept I had a dream. I thought I was on the scaffold. I heard the bolt drawn, but the scaffold would not work. Three times the bolt was drawn, and three times it failed to act.

That was all. I saw no one else on the scaffold beside me in my dream. I seemed to be alone in space.

CHAPTER X.

THREE TIMES THEY FAIL TO HANG ME.

HALF-PAST SIX!

I awoke, startled, and looked about me. . . . I thought I was on the scaffold. There were the warders and the chaplain. But no, I was still in the prison cell.

The chaplain was indeed there. He had come to pray with me, but when he saw that I was not dressed he went out of the cell and walked up and down the corridor outside till I was ready.

As I was putting on my socks, I told the warders about my dream. They did not say a word, but gave me some tea and toast. After a while they left the cell, and the chaplain came in again.

Solemn as that time of prayer was, it might have been still more solemn and precious if I had not been worried.

He kept asking me to confess that I had done the murder.

"Confess?" I replied. "I have nothing to confess. I have finished with this world. I want to think about the things of the next."

I was quite calm.

After a while Mr. Pitkin went, and the warders came back to the cell.

Slowly the minutes passed. They seemed to be hours. . . . Hark! What was that? The deep boom of the prison bell.

"Doom! Doom! Doom!" it seemed to be saying. Doom! Doom! Doom!

It was eight o'clock!

For a moment I felt Death's cold fingers about my throat. But only for a moment. Now was the time to show how an innocent man could die.

As the clock struck, the door of my cell opened and in came the governor and Berry, the executioner. With them was the chaplain, robed.

Berry stepped forward to shake hands with me, but the governor pushed him on one side, saying: "I will shake hands with Lee first."

Then Berry shook hands with me. As he did so he said: "Poor fellow. I must carry out my duty."

I now saw that he was holding a large belt with straps on it. Very quickly—so quickly that it was all done before I knew where I was—he slipped the belt round my waist, buckled it, and strapped my arms to it. My wrists were also strapped together just near the buckle.

When all was ready, the warders and officials who were stand-

ing in the cell around me formed up in procession, and we started on our way to the scaffold.

This was the order of the procession :—

Chief Warder.
Chaplain.
Schoolmaster.
Warder. Myself. Warder.
Warder.
Executioner.
Governor.
Under-Sheriff.

With slow paces we left the cell. We might have been following a coffin.

The prison bell was now tolling. I was listening to my own death-knell. In the corridor outside the cells I saw several reporters. Even during this dreadful journey to the grave I held my head high. I walked with firm, unhesitating step. No man can say that I flinched.

As we walked the chaplain read the burial service.

All at once a strange idea came into my head. The way to the scaffold was taking us through a part of the prison I had never been in before. Yet it seemed strangely familiar to me. I tried to think where I had seen this place.

Suddenly I remembered. It was in my dream. I was going over the very same ground! "Good Heavens," I thought. "This part of the dream has come true. Supposing that the other part comes true as well. Supposing I am not executed after all!"

In a few moments we went out of a door and I found myself walking across a garden near the governor's house. I looked around me. There was the garden of my dream. It was all just as I had seen it.

Right ahead of us was a low wooden shed. It was like a coachhouse, and its two doors were flung wide apart. Inside, dangling from the roof, was a rope. A few yards away in the open was the prison van, evidently taken out of the shed to make room for my execution. It looked like a huge hearse.

I looked upon all these things without fear. No man ought to be afraid of death.

What was I thinking about? Certainly about none of the awful things that are said to haunt the last moments of men who perish on the scaffold.

I remember looking curiously at the shed. The business puzzled me. There was the rope, but how was I to get on top of the shed so that I could be dropped down? You see my idea of it was that the victim had to be pushed off a height into space. The idea of a trap never occurred to me.

I had in my imagination a picture of the old gibbet—the post with the beam across it and the rope hanging down. I thought there would be a cart, and that I would be in the cart, and that when the noose was fixed the cart would be drawn away.

There was the scaffold. How did it work? I was soon to know.

Whilst my thoughts were thus occupied, we got to the shed. The officials stood aside and Berry conducted me to a place on the floor that looked like a trap-door in two halves.

"Stand there!" he said.

I don't think there was any mark on the trap or any line for me to toe. Berry simply pointed with his foot to the spot on which I was to stand, and I took up the position, standing erect with my head up just as I used to do in the Navy. Above me was a beam from which the rope was hanging.

* * * * * * * *

I will now try to describe to you the three attempts that were made to execute me. Various accounts have been published of my execution. They all differ, and are mostly wrong in their description of what took place after each attempt.

Some of them say that I turned deadly pale and that when I was finally taken off the trap my face was a horrible hue. Some say that I nearly fainted. As far as I know—and after all I am the man who should know best—I bore up from the beginning to the end of my terrible ordeal. I certainly did not faint.

Let me now tell you all about the first attempt they made to hang me.

As soon as I was in position, the executioner stooped down and fixed a belt around my ankles.

I looked about once more. Rising up in front of me was the dreary prison. At one of the windows I could see the reporters waiting to see how I would die. There were some birds hopping about in the gardens near the shed. How sweet their music was. It reminded me of my own dear little village of Abbotskerswell. I thought of our cottage, of my mother and father probably sitting by the fire, of the people I knew.

I was soon brought back to the morning's dreadful reality. Whilst Berry was making his preparations, the chaplain, Mr. Pitkin, who, of course, was robed, came and stood just outside the shed and in front of me. He was still reading the burial service. He seemed to be much affected. His voice trembled as he read.

I felt the belt being pulled tight at my ankles. Next Berry put a big bag over my head. It was like a pillow-case, except that it had elastic just where it fitted round the neck.

I had, I thought, looked my last on the light of day.

No qualms of soul tormented me. I was perfectly conscious of all that was passing.

As I was wondering what would happen when the moment of my death arrived, I felt something being placed around my neck.

It was the rope.

For the moment I was conscious of a strange sensation in my throat. My mouth went dry. I could feel the executioner's fingers about my neck. I felt him pull the rope tight, so tight that it pinched me just under the left ear.

As he jerked the rope into position, Berry asked me if I had anything to say.

"No," I replied. "Drop away!"

I held my breath and clenched my teeth. I heard the chaplain's voice. I heard the clang of the bell. I heard a wrench as of a bolt drawn, and——

* * * * * * *

My heart beat! Was this death? Or was it only a dream? A nightmare?

What was this stamping going on?

Good Heavens! I was still on the trap! It would not move!

"This is terrible," I heard some one say.

The trap had given just about two inches. It would go no further. A second passed. It was like a lifetime. The trap could not be moved!

My dream had come true!

* * * * * * *

For something like six minutes I stood on that drop blindfolded and pinioned whilst the warders jumped on the boards to make them part.

I was literally resting on my toes, and every time the warders stamped the trap shook.

Again and again the bolt was drawn, but it was quite evident that the mechanism would not work.

Such an ordeal would be enough to kill most men, I suppose. But I remained perfectly quiet, and at last I was led off the trap.

The cap, rope, and leg straps were removed, and I was taken into a little storeroom about six yards away from the shed.

Whilst I was there I believe an officer hung on to the rope, and was allowed to drop through the trap, which now worked all right.

I believe I waited in that room for something like four minutes. It was not very far from the scaffold, and I could hear all that was going on in the shed quite distinctly. I could hear them pulling the bolt backwards and forwards. This bolt, I should explain, was fixed upright in the floor of the shed to the left of the trap. It was not like a railway lever. It was more like a piece of an iron railing with a handle on it. I could hear them pulling it backwards and forwards, and each time there was a thud as the trap was released and fell inwards. The scaffold was apparently working all right. You can imagine that these preparations were not pleasant to listen to. Nevertheless, they did not break down my courage. They simply made me more anxious to get it all over.

After a time Berry came in. He seemed to be very much distressed.

Clasping his hands, he said: "My poor fellow, I don't know what I am doing!"

Then he took me back to the shed.

The second attempt was about to be made to execute me. I remember all that took place. I see the scaffold before me as I write. All the details are clear.

When I got back to the shed the officials were waiting for me. Some of them turned away as if they could not bear to witness a second time a scene similar to that which had taken place. Mr. Pitkin, the chaplain, was so distressed that he looked as if he would collapse. The warders were as white as ghosts.

Once more my legs were strapped, and once more the cap and rope were adjusted. Again the chaplain, who was standing in front of the shed facing me, began to pray, and again the bolt was drawn.

This time I made sure that I was gone. I could not see through the cap, and when the drop gave I felt as if my terrible fall into space had begun.

The shock took away my breath. I wanted to put out my hands and grasp something. It seemed as if my heart was leaping out of my body.

* * * * * * *

But death had not come yet. I sank two inches just as before, and there I remained.

The horrible stampings and hammerings were repeated, but all to no purpose.

I heard them saying, "Stamp on it! . . . Now see if it will work."

But the trap refused to move.

"Take him off," commanded some one, and I was made to step back two paces off.

The rope was left round my neck, the cap over my head, I was stifling, choking for breath.

What was passing in my mind all this time I cannot say. I had prayed to be delivered from these men's hands, and something told me that my prayer was being answered.

But it was terrible to have to stand there and listen to the attempts that were being made to get the scaffold to go.

As before, the bolt was jerked backwards and forwards, and I could hear noises as if wood was being chipped and hacked away. I believe they thought that the planks of the drop had swollen with rain, and that paring away the wood was all that was necessary. Of course, I could not see what was going on, the cap was still on.

At the end of an awful five minutes I was again placed upon the drop, and the third attempt was made to execute me.

Again the bolt was drawn, and again there came that fearful jerk as the trap stuck fast and left me poised on my toes.

Once more they began stamping on the boards, but they soon gave it up, and I was taken aside.

The rope was removed, and I felt some one unstrapping my legs.

But what I wanted was air. The cap on my head was slowly smothering me, so I tried to push it off my mouth by bending down my head and raising my manacled hands. I could only move them about an inch.

Apparently my action was misunderstood. The officials thought I was fainting. They were quite mistaken. I was terribly distressed, but I had all my senses about me.

My arms still strapped up, I was taken into the storeroom again. The doctor came in, and brought me a glass of brandy.

"No, thank you, sir," I said; "I don't want any brandy."

"Then throw it away," he said to a warder, handing him the tumbler.

I don't know what the warder did with the brandy. I expect he drank it. Instead of the brandy the doctor gave me smelling-salts.

I shall never forget the state the officials were in. When the cap was taken off I saw their white agitated faces around me. The chaplain seemed to be on the verge of collapse.

When I had gone to the storeroom, I believe the governor sent for a carpenter. I heard the grating of a saw and repeated

blows of a hammer. How long all this lasted I could not tell. I sat with my head in my hands. My mind was a blank.

Presently in came Berry.

"My poor fellow," he said, with tears in his eyes, "you have had to suffer."

He then began to take the straps off my arms.

"Don't do that," I cried. "Leave them on. I want to be hung."

The suspense was becoming unbearable. I wanted them to get it over at any price.

At that moment the chaplain came to me. His face was dreadfully white, and there were tears in his eyes.

"I suppose, my poor fellow," he said, "you know that by the laws of England they can't put you on the scaffold again?"

I did not know, and in any case I was too broken up for the moment to think. You must understand that each time the bolt was drawn I thought I was gone. For the moment I experienced a strange sensation like that peculiar "falling," sinking feeling one gets in a nightmare. This continued each time until consciousness returned and I felt my feet still on the boards.

The experience was made a thousand times worse owing to the fact that with the cap over my head I was practically in darkness. If I could have looked about me. If my hands or arms had been free, I would not have suffered so acutely. The darkness added to the horrible uncertainty of it all and made my agony almost unendurable.

After Berry had removed the straps the governor came in. Taking me gently by the arm he said:

"Come along, Lee. I'll tell you all about it."

He then told me to sit down whilst Berry took off the straps that had secured my arms and hands.

Free of my bonds, I followed the governor to my cell. The prison bell was still tolling.

Suddenly it ceased. My dream had indeed come true.

There was no execution that morning. They had tried to hang me three times.

Each time they had failed.

CHAPTER XI.

A STRANGE MEETING.

I WILL now tell you about everything that happened after my escape from death, and especially about some strange happenings which my mother has since described to me.

But before doing this I want to record a little incident that took place only a few days ago.

To my great astonishment I have discovered that amongst those who are now reading my story is a man who actually played a prominent part with me in the terrible drama of 1885.

His name is James Milford. He is now living in retirement at Exeter. But twenty-three years ago he accompanied me on the pilgrimage between the condemned cell and the scaffold. He stood by my side during that terrible half-hour. He was with me afterwards until I went away to serve my long sentence of penal servitude.

Shortly after regaining my freedom I went to see him. Twenty-three years ago he was a fine, tall, broad-shouldered man.

When the door of his parlour opened there walked into the room an old man of seventy-six, white and bent. For all that, I knew him at once. I recognised him at once.

"You're Mr. Milford?" I said, jumping up.

"Yes," he said. "And I think I know you."

He looked at me intently, and then said slowly: "You're—John—Lee!"

And then I went over to him—this man who had tried with the others to hang me—and shook hands with him. It was like meeting an old friend. There was no resentment or ill-feeling on my part. For James Milford is an old friend. In those dark, terrible days he was like a brother.

For a long time we sat and talked about the execution. He differed from me on one or two small points. He told me how whilst I was waiting for my sentence to be carried out one of

the warders used to bring me oranges and small cakes. He also recalled a little scene that took place on the fateful morning when I changed my prison clothes for my own things. He says a warder brought them into the cell and threw them down on my bed, saying: "There you are, Johnnie, my lad, there's your clothes!"

Many other things he brought to my memory again. He described to me how, when I wanted to sleep a bit longer that morning, he said, "John, if I were you, I'd go and pray." I remember that I took his advice.

Indeed, he was the very officer to whom I related my strange dream. In this connection he told me something which I would like those who are inclined to pour ridicule on my story to explain if they can. He told me that, though I had never been over either of the routes to and from the place of execution before I was taken in my dream, they were exactly the ones which I followed when I was taken out to die and brought back. I went one way and returned another. I had never been in either part of the prison before. Yet I saw them distinctly in my dream.

Mr. Milford told me that the governor of the prison, Mr. Cowtan, was so struck by this coincidence that he had a special report on the subject made out which Mr. Milford saw and officially confirmed.

My old friend was also able to assure me on one important point. It had always been said that the boards of the drop were so swollen by rain that the bolt would not act. Mr. Milford told me that after the first attempt to hang me he himself put the blade of a saw between the two doors of the drop, and found that, so far from being drawn together, there was plenty of space between. As a matter of fact, I now learn that if the bolt could have been drawn one-sixteenth of an inch further I would not now be writing my story. That one-sixteenth saved me!

Most important of all, Mr. Milford was able to reassure me on one point. He confirms my oft-repeated assertion that I never made use of threats whilst I was in the condemned cell. The wicked story which has been told about those alleged threats has caused me much pain. I am glad even at this hour to be able to produce evidence which will help to disprove it.

* * * * * * *

And now to go on with my story:—

As soon as I was back in my cell the doctor came to me. "Poor fellow!" he said. "They have made you suffer! Order anything you like for to-day to eat, and I'll see that you get it."

His kindly sympathy comforted me a great deal, and I soon recovered my usual good spirits. So I ordered ham and eggs for breakfast, and a beef-steak with half a pint of port for dinner. As I had already had breakfast, such as it was, the ham and eggs had to be put off till the following morning. But he said I could have the steak and a glass of port.

In the meantime a great commotion was going on outside the prison. You must remember that my case had created tremendous excitement in Devonshire. On the Sunday before the execution I was prayed for in all the Exeter churches, and on the morning which should have been my last crowds stood outside the prison listening to the bell tolling and waiting to see the black flag hoisted.

As I left the scaffold I saw the reporters, who were just as horrified as the officials, rushing away from the window at which they had been posted to spread the news.

I am told that as soon as they were let out of the prison gates they dashed through the town, shouting the story right and left. In less than an hour the news was in London, and the same night several questions about the fiasco were asked in the House of Commons. Much of this I did not, of course, know at the time. I was shut up in my cell.

Presently the bell ceased to toll, and in came the old man who had been ringing it to see me. He told me that whilst he was ringing he was waiting for the signal to hoist the flag. To his surprise the signal never came, and he kept on ringing and wondering how it was that he was left tolling so long.

Amongst other things, I remember turning to Mr. Milford and saying to him: "You did as much as any of the others to hang me, but you didn't succeed."

Milford was one of those who stamped on the drop when it refused to act.

CHAPTER XII.

I AM SHOWN MY OPEN GRAVE.

In an hour or so everything settled down and things went on as before. Two officers were placed in the cell, as usual. After a while some boiled eggs and some toast were brought to me. Even now I could hardly realise that I was still alive. It was strange to be eating when I ought to have been dead! I felt strong enough, but my nerves must have been considerably shaken.

Dinner-time came, and with it my steak and port wine—one glassful. I chatted with the officers, told them again about my dream, and said that whatever happened I could not be executed. I remember one of them telling me that all depended on what was decided in London. He said the sheriff had gone to see the Home Secretary, Sir William Harcourt, who could either respite me or order the sentence to be carried out. But something told me that I would never have to go through that terrible ordeal again.

After dinner I was taken out for my usual exercise in the prison yard. I ought to tell you that I never exercised with the other prisoners. I was always alone, except for the two warders. Sometimes I used to see the governor looking at me from a window. Once I remember picking up a piece of newspaper. I thought no one was watching me. But Mr. Cowtan had seen me, and the paper was taken from me immediately.

One would think that my experiences had been gruesome and terrible enough already. I had stood in peril of imminent death three times; another ordeal was to follow. How many men, I wonder, have for the sake of air and recreation been made to walk up and down beside their own open graves?

Yet this is what happened to me. After I had had my steak I was taken out of my cell to exercise. The first thing I saw in the yard was a little mound of recently-dug earth. I had never seen it before. I just noticed it from a distance. For the moment I thought no more about it.

But when I began walking up and down I discovered that by the side of the mound there was what looked like a pit. I was curious. I walked nearer . . . . and nearer.

Yes, it was a grave! My grave!

I was walking up and down not far from the spot which, but for the strange things which had happened in the morning, would at that very moment have been hiding my dead body.

One of the warders said to me: "There's your grave, Lee; all open and waiting for you!"

I used to exercise in the place set apart for the debtors, and the grave was dug in the garden that was part of their ground. The next day I went out the grave was still open, but on the third I saw that it had been filled in.

All that day I lived in uncertainty. I did not know what my fate was going to be. Still uncertain, I went to bed. But at 10 o'clock the cell door opened, and the governor came in.

"Lee," he said, "I am to inform you that you are respited."

I don't think I said anything. I was too tired. I just went to sleep.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW THE NEWS REACHED HOME.

Before I leave this part of my story, once and for all, I must not forget to say something about the strange things that occurred about this time. I cannot account for them. I do not explain them. I simply place them upon record because they are part of my story.

No father or mother needs to be told what a sad day the one of the execution was for my little home at Abbotskerswell. My poor parents were terribly distressed. My mother has since told me how they sat up till long past their accustomed hour, in order that they might sleep past the fatal stroke of eight in the morning.

They went to bed, I believe, about eleven o'clock. But they could not rest. All night long there were strange rappings on the bedroom wall. A table by the bedside shook. A candlestick on the table fell down, and the candle was broken in two pieces. In spite of that it remained alight.

When at last my mother did get to sleep she had a strange dream. She thought she saw me on the scaffold. The bolt was drawn, but the rope broke, and I was thrown to the bottom of the pit!

At last the dreadful night passed for them, even as it passed for me. Morning came. They rose, and with the rest of the family sat in the kitchen consoling one another.

My mother has since told me how a Mr. Taylor went to Newton Abbot early that morning in order to buy a little printed slip on which was to be a description of the execution. Instead of a description of the execution, he read that the sentence had not been carried out.

The town was full of excitement, but instead of remaining to talk about it, Mr. Taylor ran all the way to Abbotskerswell. I believe he covered the distance, about three miles, in twenty minutes.

Imagine the scene! My mother and father in tears sitting by the kitchen fire. Suddenly in dashed Mr. Taylor, all perspiring and out of breath.

"They couldn't hang him! They couldn't hang him!" he cries out.

My old father clasps his hands and utters two words of heart-felt gratitude: "Thank God!"

That was how the wonderful news came home.

I believe a great deal of foolish talk went through the country about this time. Since my release I have been told how people said that on the night before the execution my mother went to the churchyard and said the Lord's Prayer three times backwards!

Old farmers also declared that I could not be executed, because my family was controlled by all sorts of spirit influences. Some even went so far as to say that the Witch of the Moors would protect me. Witch, indeed! I never believed in witches.

The most absurd story of all got about after the "execution." They said that when the drop failed to act white doves were seen flying around the scaffold. All I can say is that, though I was there, I saw no doves.

I hope all this nonsense is now exploded for ever. My mother's dream and the rappings, and the candlestick phenomenon are authentic incidents. The rest is all nonsense.

After the "execution" I spent a month in the condemned cell. I was put into prison clothes, and things went on the same as before. There was very little to do. I went out for exercise every day. In the cell I read the Bible, and the tracts with which I was provided. Sometimes as I lay in bed I would ask Mr. Milford to read to me. When I was not reading I used to amuse myself with a pen and ink. One day I drew a picture of the "execution" and stuck it up on the cell wall. Whilst I was out exercising the governor saw it and ordered it to be taken down. When I got back to the cell I found that not only had my sketch disappeared, the pen and ink were also missing, and I was not allowed to use them again.

CHAPTER XIV.

I DIE A LIVING DEATH.

It was some days before I learned what my future was to be. The information was at last brought to me by the governor. He told me that her Majesty had commuted my sentence to penal servitude for life.

"I suppose you know," he said, "that penal servitude for life means twenty years! If you behave yourself you will probably be released before the expiration of that time."

I just said: "All right, sir!"

After he had left the cell I asked the warders what this meant. Mr. Milford said that I might be released after fifteen years' service.

They went to bed, I believe, about eleven o'clock. But they could not rest. All night long there were strange rappings on the bedroom wall. A table by the bedside shook. A candlestick on the table fell down, and the candle was broken in two pieces. In spite of that it remained alight.

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My old father clasps his hands and utters two words of heart-felt gratitude: "Thank God!"

That was how the wonderful news came home.

I believe a great deal of foolish talk went through the country about this time. Since my release I have been told how people said that on the night before the execution my mother went to the churchyard and said the Lord's Prayer three times backwards!

Old farmers also declared that I could not be executed, because my family was controlled by all sorts of spirit influences. Some even went so far as to say that the Witch of the Moors would protect me. Witch, indeed! I never believed in witches.

The most absurd story of all got about after the "execution." They said that when the drop failed to act white doves were seen flying around the scaffold. All I can say is that, though I was there, I saw no doves.

I hope all this nonsense is now exploded for ever. My mother's dream and the rappings, and the candlestick phenomenon are authentic incidents. The rest is all nonsense.

After the "execution" I spent a month in the condemned cell. I was put into prison clothes, and things went on the same as before. There was very little to do. I went out for exercise every day. In the cell I read the Bible, and the tracts with which I was provided. Sometimes as I lay in bed I would ask Mr. Milford to read to me. When I was not reading I used to amuse myself with a pen and ink. One day I drew a picture of the "execution" and stuck it up on the cell wall. Whilst I was out exercising the governor saw it and ordered it to be taken down. When I got back to the cell I found that not only had my sketch disappeared, the pen and ink were also missing, and I was not allowed to use them again.

CHAPTER XIV.

I DIE A LIVING DEATH.

It was some days before I learned what my future was to be. The information was at last brought to me by the governor. He told me that her Majesty had commuted my sentence to penal servitude for life.

"I suppose you know," he said, "that penal servitude for life means twenty years! If you behave yourself you will probably be released before the expiration of that time."

I just said: "All right, sir!"

After he had left the cell I asked the warders what this meant. Mr. Milford said that I might be released after fifteen years' service.

The other warder differed. He declared that imprisonment for life meant imprisonment until I died. The two of them used to have long discussions about it, I believe. Mr. Milford has since told me how they used to argue whilst I was asleep. At last Mr. Milford went to the governor and asked him to put things right. He returned with the information that, though nominally for life, mine was a twenty years' sentence.

Thereupon they both gave me all sorts of good advice likely to be of service to me in prison. I listened carefully to all they told me. Little did I appreciate how good their counsel was.

Not for a moment did my good spirits desert me. I now rejoiced in my escape from death. I looked forward to my freedom with, comparatively speaking, a light heart. I counted up the years. I wondered what I would be like when release came. I tried to think of all the changes that would probably take place whilst I was in prison. "The time," I said to myself, "will soon pass."

Had I realised what a terrible drag those years were to be I would have gone down on my knees and prayed for Death.

I did not know that I had been saved from one tomb only to be consigned to another.

I did not know that the living Death I was about to endure was more terrible than anything the grave can inflict.

I did not realise what it would be to mount slowly up through all those years, bearing on my shoulders a weary burden of heart-ache and shame.

I was a boy. I thought like a boy.

I only thought of life. And life was very sweet to me then.

* * * * * * *

Twenty years' penal servitude!

The 23rd of March, 1885. I shall never forget the date. It is seared upon my soul.

Up to this, beyond the fact that I was going to penal servitude, I did not know what was going to happen to me. I did not know until first thing that morning, when the governor told one of the officers to get ready for a journey. He then turned to me.

"Lee," said he, "I want to speak to you. Come down to my office."

We got to the office, but instead of speaking to me he handed me over to a warder.

"Hold out your hands," said the man, curtly.

"Snip! Snip!"

I looked down. I was handcuffed. In another moment I was secured with one leg-iron, fastened to my ankle and wrist. A carriage drove up to the office, and I was put inside. The governor and the warder got in, and away we drove. I soon saw that we were going toward the railway station, at which we presently arrived. When we alighted there were several people about. Some of them recognised me. The people on the platform soon got an inkling of what was going on, and a crowd gathered. We got straight into a reserved compartment, and the blinds were drawn down. They remained drawn till we left the station.

And that was how I first went to London, though I did not know where I was going.

On the way up to town I chatted with the governor and the warder. Mr. Cowtan was very kind to me. At one or two of the stopping-places he brought me milk and cakes. As we steamed into Waterloo he turned to me, and said, "I have been in and out of here many a time with her Majesty Queen Victoria." I believe he was once an officer in the Life Guards.

At Waterloo I naturally attracted a good deal of attention. The people did not know who I was, but a man in prison clothes is always stared at.

From the train we stepped into a cab, and I heard the governor say, "To Pentonville Prison!" We drove away. I had never been to London before, and I was very much impressed with the miles upon miles of streets; with the big buildings; and the crowds of people and the traffic. On and on we went till we arrived at a sombre-looking building, which I could see was a prison. We drove in through some big gates. The cab stopped, and I got out.

I was inside Pentonville.

CHAPTER XV.

IN SOLITARY CONFINEMENT.

I WAS now on the threshold of the long years I spent in penal servitude. I was a convict for twenty-two years, most of which were spent at Portland. Altogether, I was in four prisons, as you will see :—

Pentonville : March 23rd, 1885, to June 10th, 1885.
Wormwood Scrubs : June 10th, 1885, to October 28th, 1885.
Portsmouth Public Works : October 28th, 1885, to 1892.
Portland : 1892 to December, 1907.

As I look at this record the first thing that occurs to me is : Why was I kept in prison so long ?

Everybody knows that a life-sentence usually means fifteen years. There is Mrs. Maybrick's case as an example. But I know other cases in which life men have been released after serving only seven years. Why, then, was I made to serve twenty-two years in prison ?

I think the extraordinary and unjust length of my term is due to two things :—

(1) Sir William Harcourt was, I believe, a personal friend of Miss Keyse. He also knew Colonel Brownlow (my first employer), for I have an idea that I waited upon Sir William at the Colonel's when I was in service there.

(2) Certain people have said that whilst I was in prison I made use of threats.

Of the first of these reasons I say nothing more than that Sir William Harcourt all the time he was Home Secretary obstinately refused to give my case that merciful consideration which is always given to long-sentence men. He is dead now, so I will content myself with saying that I think he did not treat me fairly.

With regard to the threats, I have spoken about them before. I first heard of this charge against me in March, 1905. Prisoners, as I will show afterwards, always know what is going on. In the

ordinary course, I should have been released about 1900, and the fact that I was still in prison made me very restless.

In 1906 my mother told me something in a letter about these alleged threats, and as soon as the opportunity offered I had an interview with the Director of Prisons, Mr. Fryers. He looked up my records, and informed me that there was nothing in them about any threats.

But I was by no means satisfied, and on August 10th, 1906, I appealed to the visiting magistrates.

One of them said : "Oh, yes, I read about that in the *Times* myself !"

I think he disclosed that fact by accident. The other magistrate seemed to be rather annoyed at what he had said. I suppose they did not want me to know where the information had come from.

I reminded them that in answer to a question in the House of Commons by Mr. Fenwick, Mr. Akers Douglas had said that I had threatened people who were alive. I say again that this is quite untrue. I have never threatened anybody.

In December, 1906, I again brought the question forward, because I heard that Mr. Pitkin, who was the chaplain of Exeter Prison whilst I was there, had repeated the story of the threats in the newspapers.

I therefore appealed to the Board of Magistrates once more. They wanted to know where I had got my information from. I declined to tell them.

"How do you know it is so ?" they asked me.

"Write and ask Mr. Gladstone," said I. "If any one has anything against me let them bring it before the magistrates so that I can clear myself."

One of the magistrates replied : "If you don't tell us where you got your information from this Board can do nothing for you."

You see they knew that I must have got my information from some one in the prison. As a matter of fact it came from a warder, and I would rather have stayed in prison for forty years

than compromise the man. They were not worrying about me. All they wanted to do was to discover and punish the warder.

After this I let the matter drop. But I was finally informed by Mr. Gladstone that I was not being kept in prison as a result of any threats, actual or alleged.

I again ask why I was kept in prison so long.

At Pentonville and Wormwood Scrubs I served the "solitary" part of my sentence. In all my experience of prison life these eight months were the worst. The authorities presumably have reasons for everything they do, but why they should leave a man alone with his thoughts for eight months I cannot possibly conceive. Perhaps the object of the solitary confinement is to break the man's spirit. I should have thought that in most cases a man's heart is sufficiently broken on the day he is sentenced. I can think of nothing more calculated to drive a prisoner mad than that eight months of solitude with nothing to think of but his own miseries, with no companion save despair. Fortunately, I am by nature calm and determined. When I went to prison I made up my mind that I would live for my freedom. But for all that, solitary confinement, cruel as it is in the case of an elderly or middle-aged man, is nothing less than criminal torture when it is applied to those whose young natures yearn for freedom.

Since then a slight alteration has been made. Convicts who are always in and out of gaol serve nine months' solitary confinement. The "intermediates"—those who are not so bad—get six months', and the "star" men—the first offenders—get three months'. But even three months' are three too many.

Of course, I had to work. They first of all put me to oakum-picking. I need hardly say that I had no particular taste for that.

I picked at the rate of about a pound a month. Fortunately, I was not kept at it long. Continual oakum-picking is only inflicted on those who are of a very low standard of intelligence.

Next I was set to making duck suits. I got on all right till it came to the button-holes. I made them as big as horse-collars. The warders pretended to be very angry when they

saw what I had done. They asked me if I could make a "cat." I said "No, I couldn't." I suppose they did that to frighten me. They might have spared themselves the trouble. I had gone through a great deal too much to be frightened in that fashion. After this I made coal sacks, an "art" in which I soon became proficient.

When I was at the Scrubs it was nothing like the prison I believe it is to-day. Only "C" and "D" halls had been built, and the magnificent chapel had risen no further than its foundations.

From Pentonville and the Scrubs I wrote letters to my mother, who told me that some one had written from America to say that I was innocent of the murder of Miss Keyse. Curiously enough, only the other day I got a letter from a man in London who told me that some years ago a woman on her death-bed made a confession to a Salvation Army captain, in which she accused herself of the murder. Unfortunately I have not as yet been able to follow up this statement. It is only one of many similar statements that were made whilst I was in prison. Once in prison a man is helpless, and I was all the more powerless because I was only a lad.

From the Scrubs I went to the Public Works Prison at Portsmouth. At that time some of the great docks were being constructed, and I was sent into the basin. I remained there doing heavy navvy work until June, 1886, when I was transferred to the hammock makers. In November of the same year I went to the washhouse, where I remained for six and a half years.

By this time I had the prison rules at my fingers' ends, and soon after I got to Portsmouth I had occasion to make use of my knowledge.

The deputy-governor, Mr. Russell, got into the habit of pointing me out to visitors as "Babbacombe" Lee. In prison this is called "giving the tip." For a time I let it go on without complaining, but I grew so tired of seeing people stare at me as if I were some wild beast that I told my officer to tell the chief warder that if the practice was not dropped I would report it to the governor.

I used to hear the warders saying to the visitors: "That's Lee." And then the prisoners nearest to me would say under their breath: "They're pointing you out, Jack."

Whilst I was at Portsmouth I sent many petitions to the Home Secretary, in which I protested my innocence of the murder. To all my letters I received the same reply. I have received it so often that I know it by heart. My mother had one as late as July 3rd last year. It ran:

MADAM,—I am directed by the Secretary of State to inform you that your letter of the 24th ultimo on behalf of your son, John Lee, now undergoing a term of penal servitude in Parkhurst Prison, has been laid before the King, but that, after careful consideration, Mr. Gladstone regrets that he is unable to find sufficient grounds to justify [him, consistently with public justice, in advising his Majesty to interfere in this case.

I am, Madam, your obedient servant,

(*Signed*) C. E. TROUP.

"Parkhurst" was a mistake for Portland. I never went to Parkhurst. A few years ago I asked to be sent to Dartmoor, but they refused, because, I suppose, that prison is near my home. They told me that I could go to Parkhurst and be a "Star" man, but I declined the offer.

Of course I did not get a long letter like my mother's. The governor would simply send for me and say: "Lee, the answer to your petition is 'No grounds'!"

It was always "No grounds," till I used to tell the magistrates that I was tired of petitioning.

Before I leave Portsmouth let me recall one or two incidents which took place whilst I was there.

No prisoner is supposed to speak to an officer except when work makes it necessary. Whilst I was in prison I was reported for "making use of threat." You will see what the threat was in a minute.

When I was working in the washhouse I had occasion to complain to the governor that the work was too hard, and the deputy-governor issued an order to the effect that every prisoner was to take his turn at the wringing machine.

The next morning the warder told us about this order, but to my astonishment sent me to the machine twice. I told him I would see the governor about it.

According to the prison rules that is a threat. He reported me, and I lost sixty marks and two months' probation. I should have done the work and reported to the governor afterwards.

On another occasion, whilst I was at work in the basin I felt a bit faint. I wanted to go in to the doctor, but the principal warder told me to sit down and I would be all right in a moment. When the day's work was done and we went back to the prison I saw the doctor, but he refused to give me anything. He even wanted to report me, what for I cannot think; but the governor would not hear of it.

I shall have more to say about the doctors later on. For the present I can only say that they are, perhaps, the worst part of the prison system.

CHAPTER XVI.

TERRORS OF THE PUNISHMENT CELLS.

AT last I said good-bye to Portsmouth. The works having been completed, the prison was being broken up. One morning I was chained to some other men, and twenty-five of us were put in a train and sent to Portland.

At Portland I first went to work in the West Quarries. It was in this prison that I had pointed out to me Wells—"the man who broke the bank at Monte Carlo," as the song used to go. You see, I heard about the song, just as I heard about everything else whilst I was in prison. Later on I will explain how this came about. Jabez Balfour was also there with the "Stars," so that I did not see him.

I also came across Adolf Beck. Indeed, during part of his imprisonment I served out his oakum to him. I remember he had a stroke of rather hard luck.

You know, of course, that whilst a man is in prison he earns marks. Now if a prisoner has not lost 750 marks and has a clear

report he is given a blue dress which carries with it certain privileges.

Beck was rather friendly with a Spanish convict who was about to be released. He, therefore, one day asked the master tailor to make the Spaniard a good suit of clothes, for which he would pay when he (Beck) got out of prison.

One of the strictest rules in prison is that which forbids a prisoner to speak to an officer. Beck had spoken to the officer, and although he was only trying to do another man a kindness he was punished by being deprived of his blue dress. He got seven days' "No. 2," and it was then that I served out his oakum to him.

Whilst I am on the subject of dress I may as well say something about the special colours and marks which are used to distinguish grades of penal servitude.

When I was in prison I made sketches of the various dresses used. From the printed reproduction you will be able to see how the grades are distinguished one from the other.

The grey dress is very much appreciated by the long-sentence men, who are able to relieve the monotony of prison diet by buying such dainties as figs, apples, biscuits, jam, or oranges. They earn half-a-crown a month, and are allowed to spend fifteenpence of it on these comforts.

From the quarries I went to the punishment cells, where I was orderly for four and a half years. I then worked on the buildings for two years. After that I was sent out to saw stone, and the last part of my sentence I served in the tailor's shop.

It is usual for men in my position to write harrowing stories about the terrible punishments that are inflicted in prison. As I was the punishment orderly I saw a great deal of this phase in prison life, and the conclusion I have come to is that, making all allowance for the necessity of strict discipline in a prison, the punishments are unnecessarily severe.

Take flogging as an example. You can be flogged for mutiny and for striking an officer. The number of strokes may be anything from twelve to thirty. I can only say about flogging that it brings out of a man the very worst part of his nature. And

THE DISTINCTIVE DRESS OF VARIOUS CLASSES OF CONVICTS.

All the clothing up to number 5 is yellow. Reading from left to right the clothing indicates:—(1) First stage (first twelve months); (2) second stage (two years), black stripes on cuffs; (3) third stage (three years), yellow stripes on cuffs; (4) fourth stage, intermediate man, blue stripes on cuffs, chevron on cap and arms; (5) star man, blue stripes on cuffs, star on each arm and on cap; (6) grey dress worn by long-sentence men who earn 2s. 6d. a month and spend 1s. 3d. on comforts; (7) blue dress for good character; (8) black parti-coloured dress worn as punishment for striking an officer; (9) yellow parti-coloured dress, the penalty for running away; (10) canvas dress for those who destroy the ordinary clothing of their class.

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let no one believe that some convicts disregard its severities. I have seen some terrible objects of bleeding humanity brought back to the punishment cells. Their faces alone — I could hardly look at them — bore testimony to the awful agony they had suffered.

I suppose that nothing I can say will ever alter the lines of prison rule, but I do think that the self-respect of prisoners should be appealed to, instead of their being held in check by a system of terrorism. I know for a fact that convicts are far more fearful of a birching, the less rigorous punishment, simply because they cannot bear the ridicule it draws down upon them from the other prisoners. If they get the "cat," they are looked upon as heroes.

Then, again, take the question of tobacco. If a convict is caught with even a tiny piece he may lose 160 marks. That would mean a month longer in prison. He might even lose as many as 540 marks. The governor would say he had been "trafficking" with officers. The unfortunate convict would also lose his letter and visit. If he was getting tea at the time of the offence he might be deprived of it. He might even get three days' bread and water.

I do not smoke. I suppose after twenty-three years' deprivation of tobacco one does not feel drawn to it. But there is many a convict who would almost sell his soul for even a morsel of tobacco.

Now, that being so, is it not apparent that many an otherwise unruly convict could be kept on good behaviour merely by means of a bit of tobacco every now and then? I would suggest that tobacco should be introduced into prisons as a privilege. The quantity could be determined by the man's sentence and behaviour. I feel sure that it would be the most highly-prized privilege that could be extended to him. At the same time, the removal of the privilege would be his greatest punishment.

And speaking of privileges reminds me of one which does not work as well as I think it might.

After you have served seven years and six months in prison

you go into the long sentence division — that is, of course, if your sentence has still some years to run.

In this division you earn half-a-crown a month. Of this you are allowed, as I have said before, to spend one and threepence. Amongst the things you can buy are the following "comforts," of which I also give the prison prices :—

Oranges, ½d. each.
Figs, 4d. per lb.
Dates, 4d. per lb.
Apples, 4d. per lb.
English Tomatoes, 7d. per lb.
Nuts, 5d. per lb.
Bananas, 1d. each.
Plum Jam, 4d. per pot.

Now the first thing that struck me about this list was that the prices were much too high. If we wanted any of these things we had to put ourselves down for threepennyworth or sixpennyworth, as the case might be. I soon discovered that sometimes you would get forty dates, another time you would only get twenty for the same money.

I went to the governor and asked him if we could have the things put down in a list with the prices, and he made out the list I have already given. Before this list was arranged I used to get 150 dates in two pounds, while another man would receive ninety for the same money.

Perhaps you smile as you think of the idea of counting up dates. But I can assure you that after years of prison fare, most of which is not fit to eat, dates are a rare luxury, to be counted carefully and husbanded as long as they can possibly last.

Under this list I once put myself down for a pound and a-half of figs, but most of them were so bad that I had to change them.

Then again, when the apples that were supplied to us in the prison were a penny or a halfpenny each, I believe they could be got in the village for twopence or twopence half-penny a pound. One of the prison officers told me this. When I laid this matter before the clerk, he told me that it could not be helped. The things had been contracted for, and the price was beyond alteration.

I only wish the contractors could be made to suffer as we suffered from bad and indifferent food. A convict is sometimes punished indirectly quite as severely as he would be directly by the code.

There is another rule at Portland, which I think operates harshly against the prisoners. At Dartmoor, I believe, the men are allowed to keep pets, such as mice and rats. This is not allowed at Portland; why, I cannot imagine, when one thinks of the wonderful influence that can be exercised over even the old criminals through their pets. I was never at Dartmoor, so that I never saw the system at work, but I used to hear at Portland how the convicts valued this privilege.

CHAPTER XVII.

MERCIES OF THE CRUEL.

NEARLY all my experience was gained at Portland, but it showed me something which is, I believe, a grievance at every prison. I refer to the food.

In the old days, when I first went to prison, we did not get so much food as they do now. Then they used to keep you practically in a starving condition. To a certain extent that has been altered. You get plenty of food now, but half of it is uneatable. You must remember that all the time he is in prison the convict is "kept hard at it" during working hours. I see that some people say he can do just as much or as little work as he pleases.

These people evidently forget that over the prisoner always stands a warder, who reports him for not doing enough work if he thinks he is shirking. I do not complain about the quantity of food. Prison is not supposed to be a place of luxury, but the food should be eatable. Disgusting pieces of fat pork, bad potatoes, poor bread—these are matters in which the convict, who can do but little to help himself, should receive scrupulously fair treatment.

I brought the question under official notice in September, 1906, when the medical inspector and a doctor from the Home Office asked me what I thought about the food. I told them that there was not a fit dinner to eat all the week through. I asked the inspector if he could change my diet, and he gave me the hospital fare, but the prison doctor put me back on the old lines in a month.

During the last sixteen months of my imprisonment, which I spent in the tailor's shop, I was on "D" diet. My daily menu was as follows:—

BREAKFAST.—10 oz. dry bread and tea one pint.

DINNER (Monday).—8 oz. bread, 12 oz. potatoes, 12 oz. beans, 2 oz. bacon.

SUPPER.—8 oz. bread and cocoa one pint.

For seventeen years I only had dry bread at breakfast and cocoa at supper. Only once in nineteen years did I taste vegetables. But now vegetables are served out twice a week, and a man on "E" diet gets one half of an ounce of butter at breakfast.

Think of the suffering all this entailed to me, brought up as I was in Devonshire, a county that abounds in good things; a county in which beautiful rich cream finds a place on even the humblest tables. I wanted to mention these things at the very first opportunity. I feel that, in a sense, I represent hundreds of wretched men who are still in prison. I would like to do something for them if I could, but I suppose the system, bad as it is, must go on till some great, good man steps in and puts things right.

When King Edward came to the throne we convicts hoped for a great deal. But it looks as if the King is just as powerless as we were. I remember that there was a great scene when his Majesty visited Portland Prison in 1892. I looked through a window and saw him with some of his suite. I believe he saw one of the halls.

Whilst he was standing on the parade some of the working parties marched out. Dinner was just over, and they were returning to work.

As one of the gangs passed by a convict in the front rank of the party waved his cap and shouted: "Three cheers for the King!"

Who do you think that convict was?

It was Soar, the man who made the memorable escape from Borstal prison in December, 1901.

A prison is, perhaps, the last place in which you would expect to hear a cheer, but none heartier has ever been raised for his Majesty than the cheer Soar raised that day.

This visit of his Majesty's was celebrated by the whole prison on the following Sunday. The King had asked the governor to give us some special treat by way of commemoration, and we had half-a-pound of suet pudding and two ounces of golden syrup for dinner.

The news was announced to the prisoners at exercise that Sunday morning by the governor, and every "parade" cheered as they went round.

But it was not always so. In the years from 1892 to 1899 Portland was a perfect hell upon earth, dreaded by all convicts. You never knew when you went to bed at night what the morning was going to bring forth in the way of reports. Men would be reported and punished for such an absurd "offence" as sleeping with the bed-clothes over their heads. For this terrible crime they would get two days' bread and water, seven days longer in prison, and probably lose all their privileges.

During that period Captain H—— was the governor. He was a perfect martinet. He was just as merciless with the officers as with the men. He would make the rounds himself, and woe betide any luckless man who fell into his clutches!

Let me give you an example. One day two men in the stoneyard were splitting a stone. This had to be done by driving in wedges, when the stone was supposed to fall apart in equal halves. What it was that happened I don't know, but the stone broke unequally, and part of it was spoiled.

One of the convicts just said to the other: "Oh, dear, one of these will be no good." I assure you he said no more than that. Under the circumstances it was a perfectly natural thing for a man interested in his work to say.

But Governor H—— did not look at things from that point of view. He happened to be passing by just as the man made the remark. He told the principal warder to report the officer in charge for allowing two men to talk, and the unfortunate officer was fined half-a-crown.

From 1902 to 1907 Major Briscoe was governor. He was a kind-hearted man. Though he, too, was strict, he was also just, and would do his best for a man who behaved himself. He has since been made an inspector at the Home Office, and if he should read my story he will doubtless be proud to learn how we long-sentence men appreciated him. I have to thank him for much kindness, both to me and to my mother.

After a prisoner has been in prison twenty years he is medically examined every year. This was the occasion of my medical examination. I told the doctor about my teeth, and he referred me to the governor.

As soon as Major Briscoe saw what was wrong he brought in a dentist, who extracted eleven teeth. Now, what was I to do?

I asked the governor if I could petition the Secretary of State for another set. He replied: "Oh, that's all right, Lee! You needn't petition. I'll give you a set."

A good many prisoners suffer from toothache, due, I fancy, to the unsuitable food. For many years such a necessity as a tooth brush was unknown in prison, but six or seven years ago one was served out to any man who applied for it.

I had always cleaned my teeth with a bit of flannel, and did not see why I should take up the brush. To the end of my prison life I stuck to the flannel, but since my release I have been using a tooth brush; but I do not think the new method is any better than the old one.

Whilst I am on the subject of governors I may as well say something about that objectionable individual who poses in prison as the governor's unofficial informant—the "copper."

"Copper" is prison slang for a convict who makes it his business to tell the officials any little tittle-tattle about his fellow-prisoners. Fortunately, I never suffered from the attentions

of this kind of gentleman. They infested every party except one in which I worked from 1892 to 1895. That was No. 24 party. It contained between sixty and seventy men, but not one "copper."

Whilst I was working in the other parties in which there were "coppers" I don't think they reported me. They may have done, but I had such an excellent character with all the officials that no one would believe tales about me.

CHAPTER XVIII.

INTO THE LIGHT AT LAST!

For fifteen weary years I waited for my freedom. For seven I languished in perplexity, wondering why it had not been restored to me.

As soon as I had completed fifteen years' penal servitude I discovered to my consternation that, contrary to custom, I was not to be released. Again and again I petitioned the Home Secretary, and again and again I received the old answer: "No grounds."

The years went by, and nothing was done for me. I began to think that I would never again see the blessed day of freedom dawn. I began to think that never again would I be in my own little village with my dear mother. I thought of her advancing years. Every time she made the cruel journey to Portland I thought it would be her last.

For fifteen years I had consoled myself with the hope that I would be able to comfort the autumn of her life. I myself was growing old. As things go there cannot be many years of freedom for a man who has suffered as I have suffered. Day and night I was haunted with the fear that we would never be together again. Every time I received the official refusal I used to convey it to my mother, and try to cheer her up. She in her turn, whenever bad news came, would console me in her letters. And so we kept each other going through many years of anxiety and woe.

But dawn follows the darkest night, and Day dawned at last for me. How strangely it all happened!

On August 20th last year the governor sent for me. When I got to his office he read to me a letter from my mother, in which she announced to me that there was as yet little hope of freedom. He also read another letter from a man who was petitioning the Home Secretary in my interests. This letter also said that nothing could be done.

Having read these letters — and how my heart sank as I heard their contents—the governor communicated to me the official answer to my own latest petition. "You are to be released," he said, "at no distant date."

Nothing that I could write could convey to you all that passed through my mind at that blessed moment. The governor cautioned me that I must not break the news even to my mother.

So I was to be released at last. But when?

As a matter of fact, freedom did not come for four months, and I need hardly tell you that those four months were the weariest I spent in prison. How the time dragged! Terrible as my long sentence was, I don't think in any part of it I suffered as much as I did during those four months of waiting. The days dragged on till November 12th. On that day I was at work in the tailors' shop when the governor called me up.

"Lee," he said, "you will probably be released at the end of the month on licence under special conditions."

"Can you tell me what the date of the release will be, sir?" I asked him.

"No," he replied, "I can only say that it will be about the end of the month."

"Eighteen days more!" I said to myself in ecstasy. I could not rest till I had told my mother. But I had been strictly ordered to keep the news to myself.

On the 21st I saw one of the prison directors. He spoke to me about my approaching release, and asked me what I was going to do.

I said, "I shall go to work."

He wanted to know where I could get work. "I will leave it to you," he said, "to do what you like."

He also told me that he would send a plain clothes officer with me to Abbotskerswell. I asked him if he could let my mother know the date. He said he could not, but that I was quite at liberty to tell her that I was going home. He then informed me, out of kindness, I suppose, that the probable date would be December 20th.

Before I saw the director I had already started my letter home. Acting on instructions that had been given to me earlier in the month, I had carefully abstained from saying anything about the release. It was very hard to do it, but I wrote my usual letter to mother just as if there was still as little hope as ever.

"Dear mother," I wrote. "It is very weary waiting. But I suppose that we must live in hopes for the best."

I had no sooner finished this note than the director, as I have already mentioned, told me that I could let mother know the news.

So I sat down again, and on the next page I wrote this:—

PORTLAND PRISON,
November 21st, 1907.

DEAR MOTHER,—I hope I shall be home soon. I do not know how or when. Keep up a good heart.

Do not tell anyone. Good-bye. JOHN LEE (L 150).

Mrs. John Lee,
Abbotskerswell, near Newton Abbot, Devonshire.

Twenty-three days went by. On December 14th the chief warder told me to get everything ready for the Tuesday night. I packed up my letters, and put what few treasures I had into a parcel.

In the meantime I had gone through the usual routine which is laid down for every prisoner about to be released. I was put into a party working on the front gate, so that I could not be entered for any duties, and would be handy if I was wanted.

Even at this time very few of the warders knew what was going to happen. I kept the release a secret, except from my best friends. I told one of the warders about it. He had been exceedingly kind to me, and I always liked him to share any little

secrets I had. I also hinted to one or two of my chums in the prison that the end of my long term had come at last.

On the Tuesday morning, December 17th, the officer took me down to the front gate. I was taken into a room, where I found waiting for me a complete suit of clothes which had been specially made for me by the master tailor. Short term prisoners are given their own clothes when they are released, but convicts as a rule are supplied with a suit of blue cloth, which anybody who knows anything about prisons can recognise at once. My suit was brown. I am wearing it now, and it is serving me excellently. I was also given an overcoat and a hard felt hat.

When I was dressed the governor and the deputy-governor came in and wished me good-bye. I signed one or two papers, and then followed the plain-clothes warder who was to take me home. He was going to spend the Christmas at Torquay, and as Abbotskerswell is close by he had been told off to accompany me home.

We went straight to his cottage, where a cab was waiting. Presently we were joined by his wife. The governor saw us off to Dorset station, where we took train for Newton Abbot.

At Newton I reported myself at the police-station. After that we set off for Abbotskerswell. I shall never forget that drive. I looked out of the carriage window and saw all the old landmarks as we drove along. How my eyes feasted on them. Every turning I recognised. I was going to say that I knew every stone.

Abbotskerswell at last! The cab was pulled up in the main street of the village, and the warder's wife got out alone in order to go and see my mother and announce to her my arrival. When the news had been broken the warder's wife came back. I said good-bye to my friends, walked unrecognised up the "street," up the stone steps past the gate, along the garden path, up some more steps, across the threshold, and . . .

It would be sacrilege to say anything more. There was my dearest mother waiting to receive me. We were together once more. We are together now, and I hope we shall be spared to one another for many years.

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JOHN LEE'S HOMECOMING.

"We were together once more."

CHAPTER XIX.

PRIVATIONS OF PENAL SERVITUDE.

And now I am living my life over again for the benefit of those who are interested in my strange story.

It is strange as I sit by my mother's fireside to see passing in my mind the events of the last twenty-three years—stranger still to find them mirrored in official reports to which I have had access since my release.

For example, in the report issued by the medical officer of Portland Prison for 1907 I find this:—

> No addition to, nor alteration of, the ordinary prison diet has been required, except in the case of one convict, who has exceeded twenty years in prison, and who received hospital diet in lieu of prison diet for one month.

It is a particularly interesting quotation to me, because I was the convict referred to, and the doctor is reporting an incident of my prison life which I have described to you.

I came into collision with the doctor once or twice. I always made it a rule to obtain everything to which I was entitled. "Fair play" was my motto all through my prison life. I imagine the doctor must have thought that I was only an ordinary prisoner, and that he could therefore do with me as he liked. He soon found out his mistake. My first complaint against this official rose in this fashion. Once a month the medical officer has to go round all the cells and visit each prisoner. On this particular occasion I had nothing to report to him.

Imagine my astonishment, therefore, when at 7-30 the next morning I was sent to the infirmary and put into a cell. There I was kept hour after hour with not even a book to read. More extraordinary still, when dinner-time came round—it was "soup day"—they gave me a knife to drink my soup with! I was kept in that cell till four o'clock, at which hour the medical inspector came round.

"Who is in there?" I heard him say to the principal warder.

"John Lee," was the reply.

The inspector knew me well. He seemed to be puzzled. He ordered the door to be opened. "What are you doing there?" he said to me.

"I don't know, sir," I replied.

The medical officer thereupon said that he had sent for me, and that it was all right.

"It isn't all right," said I, "to be kept in punishment for a whole day with nothing to do or to read."

The end of it was that I sent a petition to the Home Secretary, and such treatment as that which I have described was never accorded to me again.

There is another matter I would like to remind the medical officer about. The poor fellows at Portland are cooped up in very small cells. Mine was about eight feet long, four and a half feet wide, and seven feet high! Measure that space in one of your rooms, and you will be astonished at the space in which a convict at Portland has to live.

Now I tell you this as a fact: If you went into "F North" Hall at Portland first thing in the morning it would have to be with your handkerchief to your nose. The smell in that hall is abominable. And yet the men, besides living in such a place as this, have to keep their biscuits, jams, and fruit in it! Thank Heaven I was not locked up in that place. I was brought up in the fresh country air, and after forty-three years I can think of none better. But what was the medical officer doing?

I would also like to ask this gentleman how he would care to have to wait nearly an hour to see a doctor, knowing all the time that his dinner—such as it is in prison—is getting cold in his cell?

I had to put up with this discomfort on several occasions. If a prisoner at Portland wants even a dose of cough mixture he has to get it from the doctor during the dinner-hour.

I was in the infirmary for a month with a bad cold. After I was discharged I had a slight cough, so I went to the doctor

and asked him if he could let me have some medicine in my cell.

"No," he replied, "you must come down here!"

And down there I had to go, and he kept me waiting a long time before I got what I wanted.

Elsewhere I set out the actual scales of prison diet, so that my readers may judge for themselves whether it is sufficient for a healthy man living in the bracing air of Portland and working hard all day long as I did.

Look, for example, at the ordinary *hospital* diet. This is for sick prisoners.

It is, I maintain, inferior to the ordinary diet of a working man:—

—	Ordinary Diet.	Pudding Diet.
BREAKFAST..	Bread, 8 ozs. Tea, 1 pint, containing $\frac{1}{6}$ oz. tea, $\frac{3}{4}$ oz. sugar, and 2 ozs. milk.	White Bread, 6 ozs. Milk, 1 pint.
DINNER ..	Meat, 5 ozs. (cooked). Potatoes, 8 ozs. Vegetables, 4 ozs. Bread, 6 ozs. Salt, $\frac{1}{2}$ oz.	Rice pudding, containing 2 ozs. rice, 1 egg, and 10 ozs. milk; or, Batter pudding, containing 3 ozs. flour, 1 egg, and 10 ozs. milk; or, Custard pudding, containing 1 egg, and 10 ozs. milk.
SUPPER ..	Bread, 8 ozs. Tea, 1 pint.	White bread, 6 ozs. Milk, 1 pint.

If this is the "hospital" diet, what must the ordinary prison diet be to a man accustomed to good food and plenty of it?

But I must not grumble. Let me show you something that should be interesting to every housewife, to every man who is accustomed to a good home and to good cooking. Here are the official recipes for prison food :—

BREAD.—To be made with whole-meal flour, consisting of all the products of the wheaten grain, with the exception of 12 per cent. of coarse bran and coarse pollards.

PORRIDGE.—To every pint 3 ozs. coarse Scotch oatmeal, with salt.

MILK PORRIDGE.—To every pint 3 ozs. coarse Scotch oatmeal, ¼ pint milk, with salt.

GRUEL.—To every pint 2 ozs. coarse Scotch oatmeal, ½ oz. sugar.

TEA.—To every pint ⅛ oz. tea, 2 ozs. milk, ¾ oz. sugar.

COCOA.—To every pint ¾ oz. Admiralty cocoa, 2 ozs. milk, ¾ oz. sugar.

MILK.—To be fresh unskimmed milk.

BUTTER OR MARGARINE.—To be of approved brands of best quality.

SUET PUDDING.—To every lb. 2 ozs. beef suet, 8 ozs. white or whole-meal flour.

PEA SOUP FOR MALE CONVICTS.—To every pint 4 ozs. salt pork, 4 ozs. split peas, 1 oz. onions, ¼ oz. vinegar, pepper and salt.

VEGETABLE SOUP.—To every pint, clod or shoulder, leg or shin of beef in the proportion of 8 ozs., and, in addition the soup to contain 1 oz. pearl barley, 2 ozs. fresh vegetables, 1 oz. onions, ⅛ oz. flour, with pepper and salt.

MEAT LIQUOR.—The allowance of cooked mutton to be served with its own liquor, flavoured with ½ oz. onions and thickened with ⅛ oz. flour, with pepper and salt.

DITTO.—The allowance of cooked beef to be served with its own liquor, flavoured and thickened as above.

COOKED MEAT (preserved by heat).—Colonial or American beef or mutton of approved brands and of best quality. This meat should not be cooked or heated in any way. It ought to be served cold as it leaves the tin.

BEANS.—Haricot beans, or broad or Windsor beans, dried in the green state and decorticated.

THE BILL OF FARE AT PORTLAND.

DIET for MALE Convicts after period of separate confinement when engaged in Industrial Employment.

BREAKFAST..	Daily :	
	Bread	8 ozs.
	Gruel, sweetened with ½ oz. sugar	1 pint.
DINNER	Sunday :	
	Bread	8 ozs.
	Potatoes	12 ,,
	Cooked meat, preserved by heat ..	5 ,,
	Monday :	
	Bread	8 ozs.
	Potatoes	12 ,,
	Beans	12 ,,
	Fat Bacon	2 ,,
	Tuesday :	
	Bread	8 ozs.
	Potatoes	12 ,,
	Cooked Mutton, without bone ..	5 ,,
	Wednesday :	
	Bread	8 ozs.
	Potatoes	12 ,,
	Pea Soup (Pork)	1 pint.
	Thursday :	
	Bread	8 ozs.
	Potatoes	12 ,,
	Cooked Beef, without bone ..	5 ,,
	Friday :	
	Bread	8 ozs.
	Potatoes	12 ,,
	Vegetable Soup (Beef)	1 pint.
	Saturday :	
	Bread	8 ozs.
	Potatoes	12 ,,
	Suet Pudding	12 ,,
SUPPER	Daily :	
	Bread	8 ozs.
	Cocoa	1 pint.

A convict on attaining the third stage may have 1 pint of tea and 2 ozs. additional bread in lieu of gruel for breakfast.

CHAPTER XX.

LIFE IN THE WORKSHOPS.

FROM the medical officer's report I turn to that of the governor, who gives an official return showing the employment of the prisoners and the value of their earnings during the year. From this I see that 754 men earned £23,534. That means that something like £31 was earned by each man. I was in prison twenty-three years. When I was released I walked out of prison with a little over a pound in my pocket. There is due to me, on account of the gratuity every prisoner earns, a few pounds. The exact sum has not yet been made out, but it will be next to nothing. The possibilities of earning money in prison are infinitesimal.

I do not wish to weary you with a long list of grievances, but is it right that this should be so? To go further, is it just that twenty-three years should be cut out of my life, and that I should be at the end of them just where I was, in usefulness to the community, when I went into prison?

Looking at the governor's report for 1907, I see that during the year the following "trades" were being employed at Portland:—

Bookbinders	Bricklayers
Carpenters	Excavators
Labourers	Painters
Moulders	Glaziers
Oakum Pickers	Quarrymen
Stokers	Platelayers
Shoemakers	Bakers
Smiths	Cooks
Fitters	Gardeners
Tailors	Gasmakers
Stone Dressers	Washers

During my prison life I have been variously employed. At Portsmouth I was a navvy; I also made hammocks and worked in the laundry. At Portland I worked in the quarry for five years. I worked on the buildings, doing the work of a labourer, for two years. Then I was put to sawing stone, and

finally I was sent to the tailors' shop. "Therefore," I hear someone say, "you have learned a trade!"

Nobody learns a trade in prison. To begin with, the kind of work that is done in a prison is utterly unlike anything that is to be found outside. Let me describe to you my life in the tailors' shop.

As soon as the party of which I was a member had been marched into the "shop"—a long plain building fitted up as a tailors' workroom—the master-tailor, who was a warder, and his assistant officers took up their position, and each convict went to his appointed place in the room and waited for his work. The work was then handed to each man by a convict specially told off for the purpose. During the latter part of my imprisonment this was my duty. As soon as the work had been distributed each prisoner began or continued his task without a moment's delay. Strict silence was the rule. No communication of any kind was permitted. If two men were working on the same job they were not allowed to say even that which would be considered necessary if they were working side by side in free employment. Supposing I wanted thread. It was not on the board beside me. The man next to me was using it. I would not be allowed to say: "Jones, pass me the thread!" I would have to hold up a hand like a schoolboy, catch the warder's eye, and call out: "Borrow the thread, sir?"

The warder would nod, and without saying another word I would take the thread from my neighbour, or, if he happened to be using it, I would, of course, wait till he had finished with it.

I would be bound by just the same rules if I were working on the same job with another man and wanted his assistance. I would not be allowed to say to him, "Hold this!" I would put up my hand and call out, "Man hold this, sir?" The officer would nod, and silently the man would turn and do whatever was required.

I say "silently." I suppose everybody has heard that convicts do speak to one another. There is no ventriloquism about it. It is quite simple to speak without moving one's lips. Of course, many of the sounds become blurred, but the words are

quite distinct enough to convey a meaning. Curiously enough, some old convicts have been so accustomed to speaking in this fashion that their mouths become fixed in a sort of a twist.

The punishment for talking is quite severe enough to make the luxury a little dangerous. The warders are always so posted on raised box-like platforms that they can oversee all the men in their party. For all that, it must be plain that even a warder's eyes cannot be everywhere at once. So the convicts watch their opportunity. If they are discovered they are reported to the governor, and that means the loss of so many marks—perhaps twenty, fifty, a hundred, or more in the case of an old offender—and proportionately so many more days in prison.

I used to find it very difficult to avoid talking. Whilst I was working away the man next to me would mutter: "How are you getting on, Jack?" or some question of that kind, and the conversation would begin. Often I heard men discussing the offences for which they had been sentenced. Indeed, every man seemed to know what the other was in for, but I made it a rule in my own case never to discuss such matters with anybody. In fact, to put it in a nutshell, I was always careful to give as little trouble as possible.

But what I want you to observe from all this is the utter absurdity of teaching a man a trade after this fashion. To learn one must ask questions. Even if convicts were kept employed at a particular trade long enough to make them experts in it, how could a man trained under such conditions make a living outside?

Again, the very work that is done in a prison is mostly on quite a different plane to that which is done in the world. When I was in the tailors' shop we were employed mainly in repairing garments for stock. You may take it as a general rule that when convicts enter prison they are usually supplied with either new clothes or clothes that are practically new. When they require replacing he applies for whatever he wants, and the old garments, if they are not too worn, are sent down to the tailors' shop to be repaired. When repaired the garments are passed into what is called "stock." This is the department in which are stored all the repaired clothes, and these are temporarily served out to prisoners whenever their usual clothing wants repairing.

From what I have said you will see that, although a prisoner may be said to learn the "tailoring trade," he really picks up very little that would be of use to him outside. What I have said about the tailors applies to everything done in prison. The free workman cannot be compared with his less fortunate brother in prison. If he got work after his release he would be detected in a moment. What is the released convict to do with himself? That opens up a question with which I shall deal later on.

The worst effect of the prison system is that it causes men to lose their self-respect. When they leave prison, as a rule, they won't work, though I think they would if they had really learned a trade whilst they were in gaol.

I believe that in one case at Portland the officials found work for a newly-released convict on the breakwater. The man was given good wages, and had every chance to keep straight. But it was no use. I believe he was back in prison before long.

Conversation between certain prisoners is, of course, allowed at stated times. This is a special privilege allowed to picked men, and it is one that is very much appreciated at Portland. Every Sunday those who are allowed conversation walk about with a companion, and each man can choose his "chum."

The men are not bound to speak to one another if they do not desire to do so. They may discover reasons which would make friendship mutually distasteful. On the other hand, the companionship may be productive of much good.

Amongst those to whom this privilege is forbidden are certain of the Intermediate prisoners. It seems very hard that whilst conversation should be permitted to a Star man it should be denied to an Intermediate. I cannot understand why a distinction should be made. Why are the Stars treated better than the Intermediates? A man with a long sentence in the Stars can talk after serving three years. But no conversation is permitted to the Intermediate till he has served seven and a half years. I was an Intermediate man, and I say that we were just as well conducted as the Stars. I hope that something will be done to put this obvious injustice right.

CHAPTER XXI.

CONCERNING PRISON MUTINIES.

THE governor's report also reminds me of another phase of my experiences. He speaks of the conduct of the prisoners. I see by the papers that there has been an outbreak amongst the convicts at Dartmoor. Now, I do not want to side with the convicts 'ust because I have been a convict myself. But the public must not think that such an outbreak is the result of circumstances for which the convicts alone are to blame. They must have had some provocation. I say this without fear of contradiction. Personally, I always lived on excellent terms with the officials. I made it my business to give no trouble; and, as a result, I was left very much to myself. Some men are always in trouble.

On the other hand, some officers are eternally wishing to report men on the slightest pretext. Such men are quickly marked by the prisoners. They become unpopular. Then one day a harsh word is spoken. The convict loses his temper; there is a rush, a blow—and the governor's next report says something about "mutiny" or "assaulting an officer."

Curiously enough, most of the mutinies of which I have heard have taken place amongst the Star prisoners, a class which is kept distinct from the older and more hardened convicts. In 1900, for example, a mutiny broke out amongst No. 33 party. At the time of the trouble the men were dressing stone in the quarry. I am not sure, but I think that in this case the men had some grievance, and they decided to ventilate it by refusing to work. As is usual, the plan of action was carefully arranged. As soon as the men were told to get to work several of them threw down their tools. I think seven were arrested for this disturbance. Three of them were flogged, and four were sentenced to terms of bread and water.

I don't think any successful escapes took place at Portland in my time. Three years ago, I believe, three men got out at

the end of the roof by turning back the sheet iron and squeezing out. I did not know the details of the attempt when it was made, but I afterwards heard that the thing was done at night, and that the men put dummies in their beds in order to conceal their absence from the officer on duty. However, they made so much noise that they were discovered and, I believe, punished.

Last year, again, a man managed to unlock his cell door. He got no further than the corridor, where he was at once secured by the patrol.

As soon as a man is missed from the prison the prisoners are locked in their cells and the authorities telephone the news to the barracks, where a big gun is fired. In less than an hour the prison is surrounded, the country is being searched, and there are scores of policemen on the look-out along the Dorchester Road.

If there are men working outside the prison at the time of the escape they are taken inside. All the warders who can be spared are sent out to look for the escaped convict. But Portland is so situated that a man has no chance of getting away. There is nothing much to fear from the civil guards who are armed. I believe that the weapons they carry are more like gas-pipes than anything else. At all events, I am sure that they couldn't hit a haystack, much less a running man.

There is practically no escape from prison. If I could reach those who are unfortunate enough to be in gaol I would say: Make up your mind to behave as well as possible, and you will be released all the sooner. Obey the officers. Don't listen to the old convicts. They pester one with all sorts of bad advice, which they call "tips," but as a rule nothing but trouble comes of it.

CHAPTER XXII.

MY MOTHER'S VISITS.

PRISON is a terrible drag. You never get used to it. You never settle down. You never feel at home. There was never a moment of all my prison life in which I did not long to be free, in which the fact that I was in prison did not gall and wound my heart. But it would have been madness to have tried to escape.

One great comfort a prisoner has—at stated periods he is allowed to write to his friends. All the time I was in prison I wrote to my mother as often as I could. A prisoner is only allowed to write one letter at a time, but I used to write two or three by writing them all on the same piece of paper.

I also used to see my mother. Whenever my time for a visit was near I used to tell my mother to let the authorities know the day on which she could come to see me. She would then be supplied with a permit. The same course had to be adopted if she applied for an order, as the following letter shows :—

From the Governor, H.M. Prison, Portland,
30, 5, 1907.

To Mrs. Lee, Abbotskerswell, Newton Abbot, Devon.

L 150 JOHN LEE.

In reply to your request for an order to visit the above-named, if you will let me know the names of the friends who will come with you, an order for you and them will be sent.

WALTER J. PETTY,
Dy. Governor, Y.C.

Time and again, in spite of her seventy-six years, she made the long journey from Abbotskerswell to Portland. I think the officers took pity on her. They always did anything they possibly

could to make her comfortable, and though a warder was always in the room with us, I never once had to complain that he worried us, or in any way interfered so as to make those sacred moments less happy than they were. This was in great measure due to the fact that I was always careful to observe the rules. Neither in a letter nor in the course of a conversation with a friend must a prisoner speak of anything that happens in the prison. I always had plenty to talk about without touching upon such questions. Every opportunity I got I assured my mother that I was innocent of the crime for which I was suffering. I used to give her instructions about petitions for my release, and send messages to friends. Then she used to tell me about people I had known when I was a boy. I used to get her to talk to me about her own life at Abbotskerswell. The smallest detail interested me. And then, when at last the warder would say, "Time's up, Lee!" we would say good-bye, and before I got back to my cell I would be longing for my next visit. Instead of a visit, I could always elect to receive a letter, which would be additional to the one to which I would be entitled.

After these visits and letters my greatest delight was the religious influence that comes into the prisoner's life. As I am a Churchman I attended the Church of England services. There was an excellent choir, and the services, except for the surroundings, were just what you would find in any other church.

Even here there was no chance of shutting out prison life. There were always the warders posted along the chapel like sentries. Then all the three classes of prisoners—the Stars, the Intermediates, and the Recidivists—were kept apart, but the distinction was a necessary one, which could not be relaxed even in chapel.

Holy Communion was administered twice a month. The Star men communicated on the first Sunday, and the Intermediates on the second Sunday. On Easter Day, in 1907, I believe more than one hundred men attended the Communion service. It was held at eight o'clock in the morning, and only those who attended it know how impressive and how devotional it could be. I believe the chaplain has said that a regular communicant was hardly ever reported for misconduct. In any case, such a man was always an example of self-control and steadiness.

Real religion in individual men is the exception rather than the rule in prison. I have known those who have tried to follow the services devotionally to be openly scoffed at by their companions. Under such circumstances it is not an easy matter to live up to one's professions. If you are at all "religious" you are sure to be reminded of it every time you are brought into contact with your companions. Still, many men persevere, in spite of all obstacles. God surely will not forget them.

There are no days of rejoicing in prison, so that such great festival days as Christmas would pass unnoticed if it were not for the chapel. For the last four or five years the chaplain at Portland has done much to make Christmas something like what it should be. He has had the chapel beautifully decorated with flowers and carols have been sung, to the unbounded delight of the poor prisoners. Two years ago, I believe, three ex-prisoners sent flowers for decorating the chapel. Everything, in fact, is done by the chaplain to help those who wish to make the most of the comfort of religion. Now that I am free I gladly testify to the many little acts of kindness done me by the chaplain. He deserves the best thanks of all with whom he comes in contact. I only wish that his work were more generously recognised by the convicts. Many, indeed, are grateful—amongst them twenty-four men who were confirmed in our chapel by the Bishop of Salisbury two years ago.

CHAPTER XXIII.

TERRORS OF THE LONG SENTENCE.

Whilst I speak about the chaplain, let me not forget the library which is under his care. We had a good selection of books and periodicals at Portland. I was a great reader of the magazines. From these I was able to learn something of what was happening in the world, and in this connection I am reminded of a suggestion I would like to make.

Why should prisoners, just because they are prisoners, be studiously prevented from knowing what is going on in the world, to which sooner or later they must return?

It used to annoy me intensely to take up a magazine and find half a dozen pages torn out where it had been thought desirable to remove an article not considered suitable for prisoners. The authorities presumably have good reasons for everything they do, but I have often thought that no great crime against the convict system would be committed if prisoners were allowed to see the newspapers. I have already suggested that tobacco should be included in the special privileges. Why not newspapers?

As things are at present, a convict has to pick up scraps of information by means of all sorts of childish devices, most of which constitute offences. Now, it is well known that to forbid many men to do a certain thing is directly to challenge them to do it. A convict is always looking out for news. A dirty, discarded scrap of paper he will pick up as if it were treasure. A little item of "worldly" gossip will be passed about from man to man as if it were a curiosity. In some cases the officers themselves inform favoured men of what is going on. I was always on cordial terms with most of the warders, and was, therefore, always posted up in important news. For example, I heard that Mrs. Maybrick had been released. Her case was specially interesting to me, because she was a long-sentence prisoner. I knew all about the Russo-

Japanese war and about Rozhdestvensky, or "Rod and Whisky," as we prisoners called him. I think it was my mother who told me about the death of the Queen.

There must be even now a great many events of which I know nothing. Twenty years spent under the conditions I have described to you are practically twenty years sunk in ignorance, that no one outside a prison can possibly understand. This thought brings me to another subject which I must ventilate, for the sake of miserable men who are doomed to spend many years in prison.

As I write there occur to me cases and names which the public have long since forgotten. Nevertheless, they are to be found on the prison records, where I suppose they will remain until some self-contented official wakes up to their true and terrible meaning.

Let me give you some particulars of long-sentence men for whom, in all mercy, something might be done.

A young man named Churchill, who has been in prison ten years already.

A man named Reminson, who was eighteen when sentenced. He has been in prison about eleven years.

An old man named Riggs, who has served something like eighteen and a half years.

There is a man at Dartmoor named Williams, who was also sentenced when he was a youth. He has been in eleven years.

Another man named Snelling has served eighteen years.

Another named Connolly—twenty years and four months.

There must be many other cases in which men are serving long sentences, and the question I want to ask the public is this: What is going to be done with these men when they leave prison? What will their chance in life amount to?

I think I have said enough to sweep away the fond illusion that men learn trades whilst they are in prison. I am not going to argue about the wisdom of long or short sentences, but it must be obvious that the long-sentence man—who must return to the world sooner or later—is absolutely unfitted for any sort o calling when he gains his freedom.

Every convict who undergoes penal servitude for a specified term of years gets three months knocked off each year if his conduct is good. No such favour is extended to a man with a life sentence. According to the standing orders, his case is brought before the Home Secretary when he has completed fifteen years and again when he has completed twenty years. Now, reckoning my time as a sentence of years instead of a life sentence, I served just as long in prison as if my original sentence had been thirty-one years.

I do think that some wholesome change might be made here with benefit both to the State and to the prisoner. Is it too much to ask that very long sentences should come up for revision at the end of ten years? This would give a man a chance. After all, if reformation cannot be effected by ten years of prison life is it going to be effected at all?

Judges should think twice before they sentence a bit of a boy to a long term of imprisonment. I often think that it is even a mistake to commute a death sentence. Twenty years in prison is a punishment worse than death. It ruins a man, and it burdens the community with a useless member. The only objects in a reprieve should be the reformation of a prisoner and his release after that end has been accomplished, whenever it may be. If the man is not "fit" to be at large after he has served ten years, then he is better dead. The whole position is absurd. It cannot be defended. It shows that our penal system exists mainly in order that Society can be revenged on an individual.

The word reformation reminds me of another phase of my experiences which it may be as well to note. I have always been fond of a pencil. I am no artist, but I am fond of drawing. When I had been many years in prison and had earned the respect of the officers they used to give me coloured chalks and paints. With these I used to amuse myself by the hour. I used to make sketches of the prisoners and the buildings. With the chalks I often brightened my cell with decorative designs so that visitors would ask who the "artist" was. I even made artificial flowers out of bits of old cleaning rags.

You who have plenty of happiness all around you do not perhaps feel how precious these little luxuries were to me. I wonder how many other men there were in Portland who would have been glad of similar privileges? Scores.

Why, then, should not the prison authorities allow men to decorate their cells. They are already allowed to have photographs of friends. What would be the object in preventing a man from making his cell look bright. He might be given coloured papers to decorate it with, or even real flowers. Nor would society suffer if he were allowed the possession of pictures. Pets I have already spoken of. Some day I suppose the nation will see the righteousness of these things. Another means of reformation is almost totally neglected except in the chapels—music. If music really has "charms to sooth the savage breast," and if the poor men in our prisons are all savages instead of being (as they nearly always are) the victims of circumstance, what a weapon for their conversion music would be. Think of all the wasted hours of cell life. There would be far less mutiny and assault if—say for one hour every evening, or every other evening—a piano could be placed in a hall and played to all the prisoners. "Luxury!" I hear you say. I reply, "Humanity!" Then again, instead of being locked up in their cells for nearly the whole of Sunday—that day of horror in prison—the men might be taken to lectures designed with a view to education and reform. Those influences which are recognised outside prison as being wholesome should be employed for all that are in prison, and if you still say, "Luxury!" then I will concede a point. I will even allow that punishment as "punishment" might be more severe. Punish as much as you like—*but give the man a chance!*

CHAPTER XXIV.

MY IMPRESSIONS OF THE WORLD.

From my prison experiences let us pass on to another chapter of my strange story. It is a chapter to which I turn with a feeling akin to relief, for it recalls to me hours full of sunshine, of pleasant surprises at every turn of the page.

It seems odd, does it not, for a man of forty-three to be writing his impressions of a world he has never seen before? At my age most men have attained a mature knowledge of the world and its ways. But I am a child. After twenty-three years spent in a tomb into which the great hum of the universe hardly penetrates, from which even the light of day would be barred if it were possible, I have been raised from "death" to "life," to a life that must begin anew for me, just as it began forty-three years ago.

When I was first released from prison my feeling was one of extreme helplessness. You cannot cast off in a day an almost life-long sense of oppression. After being at the beck and call of officialdom for more than twenty years one almost misses the atmosphere of slavery in which all convicts live.

I shall never forget my first sensations when the door of Portland Prison closed behind me and I was free. I felt like a man who is suddenly brought out of a pitchy darkness into blinding light. I was confused. I was lost. I only knew that I wanted to get home to Abbotskerswell. I felt as if I were making a journey to the uttermost parts of the earth. I wanted someone to lead me by the hand. I had neither courage nor confidence sufficient to enable me to act alone.

I think I would have been happier if, instead of the kind plain clothes officer who accompanied me, a uniformed warder had walked behind me and said: "Lee! go to the station!" and "Lee! get your ticket!" I missed the "Come here!" and "Go there!" existence of the prison. In plain language, I wanted to be ordered about.

To understand me thoroughly you must be able to appreciate the terrible awe with which a convict is taught to regard every person who has the slightest authority over him. For the first few days of my freedom the most humble people with whom I was brought into contact appeared to me as big men. True, I am now beginning to estimate both men and things at their proper value. A prison strips a man of confidence. It stamps out independence. It crushes the soul.

Take, for example, a little thing that happened to me the other day. I had been to see my old friend, Mr. Milford, at Exeter, and was travelling back in the train to Newton Abbot. With me was a representative of *Lloyd's News*, who sat in a corner of the compartment. I sat opposite to him. My neighbour was a Torre policeman.

Just after we left Exeter the policeman, who was very young and enthusiastic, began to talk to my friend the journalist. What do you think the subject of the conversation was?

It was all about "John Lee, the man they could not hang"!

Fortunately none of the strangers in the compartment recognised me. Perhaps it was because I was wearing a simple disguise. So you may very well imagine that the conversation was very free and easy. They say that listeners hear no good of themselves. Certainly that policeman had little good to say about John Lee. I did not wish to be discovered, so I decided to "sit tight" and say nothing. You may imagine how uncomfortable I felt; how hard it was having to sit there and listen to a man who was not only seriously misrepresenting me, but was also hopelessly at sea even about facts which are beyond discussion. For example, he stated that the scaffold was in the open air, whereas everyone now knows, or should know, that it was in the coach-house.

Fortunately my case was in good hands. My friend the journalist pretended to know nothing about me. He talked to the policeman as if the case was quite new to him; asked all sorts of questions and, though the policeman did not know it, led him on to make all sorts of absurd statements about me.

How the poor young officer gloried in these attentions! He talked about "we" as if he represented the whole police force. He hinted that he knew a great deal that he could disclose if it were not "official." And the people in the compartment listened to him laying down the law as if he were an oracle.

At Newton Abbot I left the train. But how I wish I could have tackled that constable myself. If I had been living the free life of the world instead of the caged existence of the prison, I think I would have turned to him and said: "My name is John Lee! I am the man you are talking about!" I can imagine the look of helpless confusion that would have come into the man's face if I had done so. But penal servitude smothers all one's independence. I could not forget that the passenger by my side was a policeman. He represented the Law! For years I had been bending the knee to the likes of him. I had to conceal my identity and swallow my pride.

I related this incident chiefly in order that you may understand the effect of our prison system. This is the system that is supposed to effect reformation. It is supposed to fit a man to earn his own living — to make a fresh start in life. I cannot hope that anything I say will have the slightest effect on the iron-bound, tape-tied, self-satisfied officialdom of the Home Office. Some day, I suppose, these men will see the absurdity, the wickedness of their methods. I deliberately say to my readers that prison, so far from improving a man, either makes him helpless or a thousand times worse than he was when he first went into it. Every pound that is spent on the prisons of this country is a pound spent in the manufacture of a criminal! Remember that.

Supposing I had had no good friends when I was released. Supposing I had had no mother or home to go to. What would have become of me? There are all sorts of charitable organisations designed to help the ex-convict. Ask any man who has come into contact with them what he thinks about such organisations. Ask him, further, what he thinks about the system of police supervision, which haunts every man who has been released from prison. Personally, I have no complaint to make. On

every side, without one exception, I have been treated by the police with every consideration. Their very kindness has shown me what powerful *friends* they could be to a man in my position if only red tape and official blindness did not order them otherwise. For I know that the ex-convict *does* suffer grievously.

But I was talking about my first impressions of freedom. My first thought was that the world must have left me far behind. I had an object lesson of this as soon as I got to the station on my way to Newton Abbot. What tremendous strides the railways have made since I was a boy. For twenty-three years I seem to have been asleep. I have woke up in a world that flies round in a whirlwind. Everybody and everything is in a hurry. Around Newton the change is not so visible. It is only when the journey to London is made that one realises how quickly events have moved since the far-off days of 1885.

My own village seems to be very much as it was when I first left it. There only the people have changed. It made me feel very old to go home, and to see faces of which I had just a dim recollection, as those of school-fellows and playmates, now covered with all the signs of middle-age. My old playmates have grown to be men. Some of my school friends are now mothers and fathers with families nearly grown up. There are people in the village who do not remember me at all. Others knew me in the old days, and are not ashamed to know me now. Some, too, have given me the cold shoulder, just as others have been overflowing with the spirit of Christianity.

Although in a great measure I had lost touch with the world, it was soon made plain to me that I had not been forgotten. The authorities carefully concealed the fact that I had been released, and the news was not published till some hours after I had left prison. I knew that there was great excitement a few years ago, when it was thought that I was about to be set free. I believe that on that occasion hundreds of people waited for me at the railway stations. When I actually was released, I escaped every kind of attention till I got home. There on the following morning I was waited upon by scores of journalists, all of them anxious to get from me the story I had to tell. With the assistance of

my mother I kept the reporters at bay. I carefully abstained from showing myself to anybody. When callers knocked at the door I hid myself in a room upstairs, whence I could hear my mother dealing with the visitors downstairs. One reporter —so anxious were they all to see me—actually said that he came from the Home Secretary. My mother at once came upstairs and told me about this "official" messenger. But simple as I may be, that was not enough for John Lee. I had made up my mind that if my story was wanted it should be told only in my own way.

I am now getting accustomed to the curiosity that I have excited. All the little inconveniences to which I have been subjected have been completely wiped out by the kindness of my friends. Even people whom I do not know have come up to me in the street and taken me by the hand. In Newton I have been greeted in this whole-hearted fashion several times, until on one or two occasions I have been compelled, for the sake of peace, to deny my own identity. I do not glory in these things; they are simply part of my experiences.

CHAPTER XXV.

I VISIT LONDON.

And now let me tell you about my trip to London. My expressions of delight and surprise may appear to you to be childish, but you must remember that things which are familiar to you are new to me. What shall I say, then, of the majestic train that steamed into Newton station that afternoon? As it rolled grandly by I thought of the little engines I knew of when I was a boy, of the trains that we used to travel in in those days. Compared with those, here was something that looked like St. Paul's compared to the little church at Abbotskerswell.

Whilst I was in prison I read every magazine I could get hold of. I therefore knew to some extent what was waiting for

me outside. Here was one of the corridor trains of which I had read—lighted by electricity, fitted with a kitchen, a dining-saloon and lavatories. I looked into the sumptuous first-class carriages and wondered who the people could be who travelled in such magnificence.

Speed, speed, speed—there seems to be nothing but speed these days. We dashed through the country till I began to fear (like the American of whom I have read) that the train would eventually run right off this island of ours and fall into the sea. We roared through stations, and whizzed beneath bridges till my head turned and I sat back in my seat, bewildered and amazed. Our only stop was at Exeter—the Exeter that has played such a dramatic part in my story. I have visited it once since those dreadful days. I have driven past the very prison in which I saw the grave waiting to receive me.

After leaving Exeter we went straight through to London. "First stop London!" There's a note of progress for you. I thought of my last journey to the Metropolis. I was then handcuffed, and the train seemed to crawl, as if even it were reluctant to bear me to the tomb from which I have so lately emerged. Now, I was free, and the train rushed forward like a creature frantic with joy.

Paddington Station! Already I could hear the roar of London. I have read somewhere or other about the mighty murmur of that great city. I seemed to have been transported from the peaceful country into another world.

But there was little time for thinking of all these things. My eye was quickly caught by something I had never seen before. It was a thing that made a noise like a sewing machine. It had big bulky wheels. Two huge dazzling lamps gave it the appearance of some fiery monster. It pulsated like a thing alive. In short—I was looking at the first motor-car I had seen.

There were several of them about the station. I had expected to see them, so I was not surprised. I don't think I would have been surprised if some gigantic flying-machine had floated silently into the great terminus and set down a passenger

on the platform. I had read about these things. It was a pleasure to see that what I had read was true.

Whilst I was looking about me another motor-car drew up. It was like the old four-wheeler, but it was painted red, and altogether looked much smarter. Into this I was assisted, and before I knew what was happening I was being whisked away at a pace that made me hold on with both hands. When they saw my astonishment my fellow-passengers smiled. They explained that this was one of the new taxi-cabs. I had read of these also—how they registered the mileage and the fare. As we sped along I looked out of the window and watched the fare mounting slowly up by two-pences. Every time there was a block in the traffic and we were held up the mileage seemed to increase. Now and then the driver glanced at the clock—to see if it was working all right, I suppose.

A fearsome thing for a man like me is a drive across London. It made me realise the might of the Society against which I was supposed to have offended—those palatial mansions, the gorgeous shops, the majestic thoroughfares, the noble park; the lights, the glare and glitter of it all. My mind went back to the dark days behind me. I thought of my little cell at Portland, which would not have held the cab I was driving in. Society is, indeed, all-powerful. How helpless its victims!

As we bowled along I noticed that gas seemed to have been superseded everywhere by electric light. In most of the streets through which we passed I could have read a letter confortably. Everything stood out boldly, as in the light of day. What a contrast to the peaceful little village where I was born: where at that very moment my old mother was, perhaps, sitting in the twilight by the fire.

Every now and then I saw great wide doorways, through which people were streaming in and out beneath great dazzling lights. These places, I was informed, were the entrances to the Tube stations, about which I had already read in prison. The old go-as-you-please days are over. Gone are the days when the dandies used to lounge along the streets of London. Instead they

dive into the bowels of the earth, and, in perhaps five minutes, re-appear a mile away.

I was particularly pleased to see the Marble Arch. Somewhere in prison I read that years ago City urchins used to sleep there at night. I understand that those times, too, are gone with the rest of the old traditions.

On and on we went amidst an increasing roar—past street upon street of tall mansions, till we got to the City, where I noticed that they are still old-fashioned enough to use gas, where all the rest of London seems to have been converted to electric light. I saw the spot where Temple Bar used to stand—indeed, I saw so many new and strange things that day, that I should have to write a book in order to tell you all about them.

The next two or three days I spent in seeing the sights. Incidentally, I made my bow to the London policemen, for, being a convict on ticket-of-leave, I had to report myself. I found the London policemen more formal than my old friends at Newton Abbot. They made me feel as if I was a convict. No matter—I must not complain.

Of the many things I saw, I think the bioscope impressed me most. I have not seen any of the wonderful air-ships that have been constructed. I have not seen the sea monsters that now ply between Liverpool and New York. So that to me the bioscope represents, I think, all that spells the tremendous progress of which I read so much in prison. I was not struck so much by those wonderful pictures as by the complacent air of familiarity with which they were watched by the audience. My visit to London has, as it were, thrown me off my balance. I feel confused. The pace is too tremendous for a man like me. But the people of London—they are wonderful. They are a "sight" in themselves. They represent to me, too, the cool, calm, matter-of-fact engineer down in the depths of Fleet Street, where a newspaper is being printed. Have you ever seen him?

He stands alone, like a pilot in the midst of a storm. His hand is on a little electric lever. All around him the most wonderful machinery in the world, obedient to his will, rages like forty thousand whirlwinds, sweeping up the news of the universe.

In and out of this monster maze of wheels men dive and creep like dwarfs. They crawl over it. They talk to it. They caress it. They ease its mighty joints with the turn of a screw or the tap of a hammer. The air is full of dust, and through the dust they shout to one another, like sailors when the storm shrieks about the rigging, and the canvas, slatting in the gale, has to be gathered up by arms of iron and slewed to the boom.

And all the time the man at the lever — ever watchful, silent, motionless. A carving in flesh of steel. A man!

That man reminds me of the people of London living in an age of progress that was undreamt of when I was a boy.

CHAPTER XXVI.

FAREWELL.

And now I take my leave of my readers. I have told my story; I have told it in the simple language of a simple man. I have told it without rancour—fairly, honestly, truthfully.

I ask for no verdict. You may believe or disbelieve me, according as you please. I only ask for peace, for the few little blessings and hours of sunshine that may yet be left to a soul weary and sorrowing.

I ask for a chance to earn my bread in comfort and security. Whatever may be my fate, I shall meet it as unflinchingly as I have met dangers that are unparalleled in the history of any other man.

I want to be a comfort to my mother in her old age. I may have many battles to fight yet. For myself I care nothing. I have buckled on the armour of Faith. It has turned many a hard blow in its day. It will turn many more. But what I do ask of any who may be inclined to misjudge me, perhaps to make my path harder, is this: Remember my mother in her cottage at Abbotskerswell. Spare her, if you do not spare me.

I must begin my life anew. I look forward to the approaching struggle with deep apprehension. The absurd prison system of this country has forced upon my shoulders unequal odds. Without experience, without training, I must learn to handle the strange tools with which Progress is building up a new world to-day. All that total abstinence, perseverance, and hard work can do shall be utilised by me for my advancement.

By way of a beginning, I take up my pen and strike it across the dark pages of the past. Henceforth they are blotted out. I turn over the clear, bright page of Hope, and at the top of it I write: The New Life and Fortunes of

John Lee