

# The Man *THEY* COULD NOT HANG

**THE  
Marvellous  
LIFE  
STORY  
OF  
JOHN LEE**

*Absolutely  
True.*



The Personal Story Of...

# The Man They Could Not Hang

## 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 boiling 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 mantle-piece, 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 realize 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 that 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 year 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.

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 a 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 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' 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?

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## CHAPTER II.

### I AM INVALIDED FROM THE NAVY

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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 Babba-combe.

"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 depot 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 Bow-

man. 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.  
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I had found a profession. I was doing well.

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

I was now eighteen. In a few months I would have been rated as an ordinary seaman, when a misfortune befell 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 of no more use to the Navy. I was invalidated 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.

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### 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 offense. 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 jail. 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 while 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.

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### 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 in letters of blood if so be it can be written in 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 stepsister, the cook. I did the odd jobs and 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 honor 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.

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 that 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 at-

tended 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' 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!"

Realizing 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 around.

## 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 "claw like"—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 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 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 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!

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## CHAPTER VII.

### RECOLLECTIONS OF MY TRIAL

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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 while 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.

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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 recognize 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 hurrying to and fro between police stations, jails, 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 realize 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's 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.

fortunately 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 left the dock how the people gazed at me. They were watching, I suppose, 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. It is 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 wardens. 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 wardens come closer to me.

I forget what the judge said. There was something about "place of execution . . . hanged by 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 warden 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.

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## CHAPTER IX.

### IN THE CONDEMNED CELL

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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 black suit, but I was now made to exchange it for prison clothes. They were brought to me by two wardens as soon as I got back from the trial. The governor came into the cell with the wardens. "Change your clothes, Lee," was all he said. I put on the prison clothes,

and one of the wardens took away my black suit.

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

The moment he did so I entered a fresh ordeal. Two wardens 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, among 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, stubby 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 wardens.

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 wardens, 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!"

People were always asking me to confess. I used to say: "If I tell you a lie, you'll believe me. If I tell you the truth, you won't believe me." Had I been 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 he got the notion from. You must know that one of the two wardens 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 wardens, 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 con-

demned 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 pain. My mother bore up well, but my father was almost brokenhearted. 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 wardens were always present at these visits, but they used to take as little notice of us as possible.

I shall never forget saying goodbye 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 favorable 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 defense cost \$300. 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 wardens, except on the last Sunday, when there was a little man walking up and down.

"Who's that?" I asked.

The wardens 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 while 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 wardens 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 wardens 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 the chaplain went, and the wardens came back to the cell.

Slowly the minutes passed. They seemed to be hours.

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 around 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 wardens and officials who were standing 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 warden.	
	Chaplain.	
	Schoolmaster.	
Warden.	Myself.	Warden.
	Warden.	
	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 small house, 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 the 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.

\* \* \*

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

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 around the neck.

## Three Times They Put Him On The Trap But Three Times He Cheated The Law.



Illustration Shows How Publications  
Of the Time Pictured John Lee  
On the Scaffold

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 someone 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 wardens jumped on the boards to make them part.

I was literally resting on my toes, and every time the wardens 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 traps 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 wardens 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 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 warden, handing him the tumbler.

I don't know what the warden 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 store-room, 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.

## A STRANGE MEETING

"Don't do that," I cried out. "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.

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 among 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 parlor opened there walked into the room an old man of seventy-six, white and bent. For all that I knew him at once. I recognized 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: "Yoh'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 days he was like a brother.

For a long time we sat and talked about the execution. He differed with

me on one or two small points. He told me how while I was waiting for my sentence to be carried out one of the wardens 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 warden 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.

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.

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 while 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 to be able to produce evidence 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 today 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 beefsteak with 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.

Presently the bell ceased to toll, and in came the old man who had been ringing it to see me. He told me that while 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.

Among 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.

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## 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 realize 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 glass. 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 wardens. 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 wardens 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 day 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 ten 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.

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## 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 heartfelt 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 forever. 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. While 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 sketches disappeared, the pen and ink were also missing, and I was not allowed to use them again.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

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### I DIE A LIVING DEATH

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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 wardens what this meant. Mr. Milford said that I might be released after fifteen years' service.

The other warden 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 while I was asleep. At last Mr. Milford went to the governor and asked him to put things right. He returned with the information that, although 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 while I was in prison. "The time," I said to myself, "will soon pass."

Had I realized 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 realize 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," he said, "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 warden.

"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 warden 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 recognized 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 warden. 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 great 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 somber-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 while 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 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 the 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 while 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 warden, 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 warden.

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 asked 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 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 jail 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 wardens 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 today. 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 while 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 here doing heavy 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 one-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 "given 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 warden that if the practice was not dropped I would report it to the governor.

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

While 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.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### 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 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 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 the 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 for 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 lat-

est 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 tailor's shop when the governor called me up.

"Lee," he said, "you will probably be released at the end of the month on license 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 going 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 warden 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 wardens knew what was going to happen. I kept the release a secret, except from my best friends. I told one of the wardens 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 especially 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 recognize 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 warden who was to take me home. He was going to spend 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 recognized. 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 warden'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 warden's wife came back. I said good-bye to my friends, walked unrecognized 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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## CHAPTER XVII.

### MY IMPRESSIONS OF THE WORLD

From my prison experiences let me 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 warden 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 traveling back in the train to Newton Abbot. With me was a newspaper representative, who sat in a corner of the compartment. I sat opposite to him. My neighbor 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 recognized 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.

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 organizations designed to help the ex-convict. Ask any man who has come into contact with them what he thinks about such organizations. 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 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 woken 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 realizes 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 station. 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. I 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.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### I VISIT LONDON

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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.

While 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 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 traveled 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 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 emergd. 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 pulsed 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.

While 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 taxicabs. 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. Every time there was a block in the traffic and we were held up the mileage seemed to increase.

A fearsome thing for a man like me is a drive across London. It made

me realize 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 comfortably. Everything stood out boldly, as in the light of day.

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 the 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 airships 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 ilke 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 undreamed of when I was a boy.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### 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 rancor—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 armor 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 in 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 today. All that total abstinence, perseverance, and hard work can do shall be utilized 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 Fortune of

JOHN LEE.

THE END