

my friend. A fortnight more for him is better than a long spell for you."

The clock of the penitentiary boomed half-past nine.

A great cold lung of a corridor, paved with grey stone, and flanked by little doors studded with iron nails and eyed by wickets, ran down the centre of the main building. The only sounds audible along this passage were the mournful tramp of the warder on duty, the whistling of the gas-jets, and an occasional deep groan or half-stifled ejaculation from one of the "bird-cages." Within the cells, those prisoners who were not too indifferent to listen could hear the drip, drip of water falling at intervals from the outside roof. A black number was painted above each door. At some of the wickets a blank, hungry-eyed face stared at the warder when he passed.

Under the coping-stone which bore the figures 430, a face, by no means lacking in intelligence, was pressed into the square aperture. This convict showed no weariness after his day's toil in the quarry. His eyes were bright, his face flushed, his lips dared to part from time to time, in disregard of prison regulations, to discharge a whisper in the direction of the guardian of the black sheep. The wild eyes of 429 opposite—a lifer for manslaughter—glared at him with terrible envy, and once, when the great clock chimed, he flung himself against the solid door of his cell and howled so wildly that the warder's tramp momentarily ceased, and his harsh voice threatened the governor and the dark cell.

"Say, what's the time?" pleaded 430, as the officer came by.