

MOONDYNE JOE

THE GOLD MINE OF THE VASSE

VII. MILLBANK

Arrived in London, he proceeded at once to the Colonial Office, and left his letters for the Secretary, and with them his address in the metropolis. He went through the same routine with the despatches for the Prison directors. Then, though his heart craved instant action, he was forced to exercise his patience, to wait until these high and perhaps heedless officials were pleased to recognize his presence.

The great city was a wonder to him; but in his intense pre-occupation he passed through it as if it had been familiar from childhood. On the day after his arrival, not expecting an answer from the officials, one of whom, the Colonial Secretary, was a Cabinet Minister, he tried to interest himself in the myriad strangenesses of London. He visited Westminster Abbey and the British Museum. But, everywhere, his heart beat the same dolorous key; he saw the white face, the slight crouching figure in the dock, the brown hair bowed in agony and disgrace. Among the walls of the great picture-gallery the gilded frames held only this pitiful scene. Among the tombs of the kings in Westminster, he thought of her ruined life and shattered hope, and envied, for her sake, the peace of the sleepless marble knights and ladies.

All day, without rest, or food, he wandered aimlessly and wretchedly through the sculptured magnificence of the galleries. When the night closed, he found himself, almost unconscious of how he had come to the place, or who had directed him thither, walking with bared and feverish brow beneath a high and gloomy wall—the massive outer guard of Millbank Prison.

Hour sped after hour, yet round and round the shadowy, silent, precipice of wall the afflicted heart wandered with tireless feet. It was woful to think how near she was, and to touch the sullen granite—yet it was a thousand times more endurable than the torture and fear that were born of absence.

Surely, if there be any remote truth in the theory of psychic magnetism, the afflicted soul within those walls must have felt the presence of the loving and suffering heart without, which sent forth unceasingly silent cries of sympathy and comfort. Surely, if communion with living spirits be possible, the dream of the lonely prisoner within must have thrilled with tenderness when his fevered lips were pressed as lovingly to the icy stone of the prison wall, as once they were pressed to her forehead in affectionate farewell.

Back to his hotel, when morning was beginning to break, the lonely watcher went, spiritless and almost despairing. The reaction had begun of his extreme excitement for the past four days. He passed along the lonesome river, that hurried through the city like a thief in the night, flashing under the yellow quays, then diving sullenly beneath dark arches or among sily keels, like a hunted murderer escaping to the sea. Wild and incoherent fancies flashed through Will's feverish mind. Again and again he was forced to steady himself, by placing his hand on the parapet, or he should have fallen in the street, like a drunken man.

At last he reached his hotel, and flung himself on his bed, prayerless, friendless, and only saved from despair by the thought of an affliction that was deeper than his, which he as a man and a faithful friend, should be strong to relieve and comfort.

It was past noon when he awoke. The fever had passed, and much of the dejection. While dressing, he was surprised to find his mind actively at work forming plans and surmises for the day's enterprise.

At breakfast, a large official letter was brought him. It was a brief but unofficially cordial message from the Colonial Secretary, Lord George Somers, appointing an hour—2 o'clock on that day—when he should be happy to receive Mr. Sheridan at the Colonial Office.

Under other circumstances such an appointment would have thrown off his balance a man so unused to social or formal ways as this stranger from Australia, whose only previous training had been on a merchant ship. But now, Will Sheridan prepared for the visit without thinking of its details. His mind was fastened on a point beyond this meeting.

Even the formal solemnity of the powdered servant who received him had no disturbing effect. Will Sheridan quite forgot the surroundings, and at length, when ushered into the presence of the Colonial Secretary, his native dignity and intelligence were in full sway, and the impression he made on the observant nobleman was instantaneous and deep.

He was received with more than courtesy. Those letters, Lord Somers said, from Australia, had filled him with interest and desire to see a man who had achieved so much and who had so rapidly and solidly enriched and benefited the Colony.

The Colonial Secretary was a young man for his high position—certainly not over forty, while he might be still younger. He had a keen eye, a mobile face, that could turn to stony rigidity, but with a genial and even frank countenance when conversing cordially with this

stranger, whom he knew to be influential, and who certainly was highly entertaining.

Will Sheridan was soon talking fluently and well. He knew all about the Penal Colony, the working of the old penal system and the need of a new one, the value of land, the resources of the country, the capabilities for commerce; and all this the Secretary was most anxious to learn.

After a long interview, Sheridan rose to take leave, and the Secretary said he hoped to see a great deal of him before his return to Australia, and told him plainly that the opinions of a settler of wealth and intelligence on colonial matters in Western Australia were just then of special importance to the Government. He also wished it were in his power to give Mr. Sheridan pleasure while he remained in England.

There was only one thought in Sheridan's mind all this time, and now was the moment to let it work. He said he desired very much to visit the convict prisons in England, and compare the home system with that of the Penal Colony.

The minister was gratified by the request, and, smiling, asked which prison he would visit first. Will mentioned Millbank, and the minister with his own hand wrote a few lines to the governor, and handed the paper to his visitor.

Will Sheridan took his departure, with a tremulous hope at his heart, and drove straight to Millbank Prison.

There is something strange, almost unaccountable, and yet terrible, in the change that appears in half a century in the building of prisons. Few people have thought of this, perhaps; but it contains a suggestion of a hardening of hearts and a lessening of sentiment. The old prisons were dark and horrible, even in aspect, while the new ones are light and airy. In the latter, the bar takes the place of a wall—and the bar is often ornamented with cast-iron flowers and other slightly but sardonic mockery. Better the old dungeon, with all its gloom, better for the sake of humanity, than the new prison is a cage—a hideous hive of order and commonplace severity, where the flooding sunlight is a derision, and the barred door only a securer means of confinement. For the sake of sentiment, at least, let us have the dismal old keep, that proclaims its mission on its dreadful brow, rather than the grinning barge that covers its teeth-like rails with vulgar metal efflorescence.

The great penitentiary of Millbank is, or rather was, an old-fashioned prison, its vast arched gateway sombre and awful as a tomb. It has disappeared now, having been pulled down in 1875; but those who visited it once, or who even passed it, will never forget the oppression caused by its grated and frowning portal. In the early part of this century, the Government of Great Britain determined to build an immense penitentiary, on the plain laid down by Jeremy Bentham in his celebrated "Panopticon, or the Inspection House." Bentham's scheme proposed a colossal prison which should contain all England's convicts and dispense entirely with transportation. The Government, acting on his plan, purchased a large and unhealthy tract of flat land, lying beside the Thames, and on this the unique structure was raised. The workmen were ten years in completing it; but, when it was finished, Englishmen said that it was the model prison of the world.

And it certainly was a great improvement on the older prisons, where those confined were often herded, many in a room, like cattle the innocent with the guilty, the young and pure with the aged and the foul. In Millbank, every prisoner had his or her own cell—a room of stone, walls, ceiling and floor, with a large and heavily-barred window. Each cell was 8 feet square. The prison was built in six vast pentagons, radiating from a central hexagon, from which every cell was visible. The entrance to the prison, from the street, was a wonder of architectural gloom. First, there was a dark archway of solid masonry, from the roof of which, about 6 feet from the portal, sprang a heavy grate or portculcull, with spear-points apparently ready to fall and cut the unfortunate off for ever from the world. Far within the arch appeared a mighty iron gate, ponderously barred, with an iron wicket, through which an armed warder could be seen on sentry within the yard.

These details were not noticed by Will Sheridan as he entered the echoing archway; but he was chilled, nevertheless, by the cold shadow of the surroundings. The warder within came to the wicket, and took the letter, leaving Will outside. In a few minutes, he found that his introduction was an "open sesame." The governor of Millbank himself, an important gentleman in a black uniform with heavy gold facings, came speedily to the wicket, the ponderous bars were flung back, the awful door rolled aside, and Will Sheridan entered.

The governor was very gracious to his distinguished visitor. On learning his desire to see the arrangements of the prison he himself became the guide. An hour was spent in the male side of the establishment, which was an age to Will Sheridan. While the governor thought his attention was engaged in observing the features or motions of some caged malefactor, the mind and fancy of the visitor were far otherwise employed. He did not see the wretched, crime-stained countenances in the cells he

passed; but in every one he saw the white face, the brown hair, and the crouching figure that filled his mind.

At last the governor asked him to visit the female prison, in which the discipline was necessarily different. They passed through a long passage built in the wall, and entered the corridors of the female prison.

Sheridan's heart beat, and the blood flashed from his face, leaving him ghastly pale, as he passed the first iron door. He feared that the governor might notice his agitation; and he wondered how he should learn whether Alice were there or not.

As he walked down the corridor he noticed that on every door was hung a white card, and, approaching, he read the name, crime, and sentence of the prisoner printed thereon. This was a relief to him; as he walked he read the name on every card, and on and on they went, up stairs and down, and round and round the pentagons, until he thought she surely was not in the prison, and the governor concluded that his visitor evidently meant to see all that was to be seen.

When the last corridor on the ground floor was entered, Will read every name on the doors with a despairing persistence, and his heart sank within him as he came to the last.

The governor opened the door at the end of the passage, and they entered a light, short corridor, with large and pleasantly-lighted cells. Here, the governor said, were confined those prisoners, who, by extreme good conduct had merited less severe treatment than the others.

Will Sheridan's heart leaped within him, for he knew that this was the place he should see her.

On the doors were simply printed the names and sentences of the occupants; and, at the fourth door Will stopped, and read the card:

ALICE WALMSLEY
LIFE

Seeing him pause, and intently examine the card, the governor beckoned to the female warder, who was in the passage, to come and open the door.

The woman approached, the key in her hand, and stood aside until the gentlemen withdrew from the door. Will turned and read her intention, and with a shudder he put her back with his hand.

"No, no, not her," he said hurriedly; then, recollected himself: "No, no, the prisoners do not like to be stared at."

Next moment, before he could think of the consequences, he turned again, and speaking rapidly, said—

"I am wrong, I should like to see—I should like to see the interior of this cell."

The lock clicked back, the heavy iron door swung open, and William Sheridan saw Alice Walmsley before him.

She had been sewing on something coarse and white, and a heap of the articles lay at her feet. As the door opened, she stood up from the low seat on which she had sat in the centre of the stone-floored cell, and with her eyes on the ground, awaited the scrutiny of the visitors, according to prison discipline.

Will Sheridan took in the whole cell at once, although his eyes only rested on her face. She never looked on him, but stood in perfect calmness, with her eyes cast down.

She was greatly changed, but so differently changed to Will's expectations, that he stood amazed, stunned. He had pictured her fragile, broken, spiritless, wretched. There she stood before him, grown stronger than when he had known her, quiet as a statue, with a face not of happiness, but of intensified peace, and with all that was beautiful in her as a girl increased a thousand-fold, but subdued by suffering. Her rich brown hair had formerly been cut close, but now it had grown so long that it fell to her shoulders. Her face was colorless for want of open air and sunshine. A casual observer would have said she was happy.

Something of her peace fell upon William Sheridan as he looked upon her. Suddenly he was recalled to consciousness by a simple movement of hers as if averse to inspection. His heart quickened with fear and sorrow for his impulsive action in entering the cell, for now he would give all he possessed that she should not look upon his face. He turned from her quickly and walked out of the cell, and he did not look round until he heard the heavy door swing into its place.

When he had walked so far from the cell that she could not hear his voice, he asked the governor what work these privileged prisoners were engaged in, and was almost startled into an exclamation of astonishment when the governor answered:

"They are just now engaged on a pleasant task for themselves. They are making their outfit for the Penal Colony."

"Is she—that prisoner going to the Penal Colony?" asked Will Sheridan, scarcely able to control his emotion.

"Yes, sir; she and all those in this pentagon will sail for Western Australia in the next convict ship," said the governor. "We shall send three hundred men and fifty women in this lot."

"When does the ship sail?" asked the visitor, still apparently examining the door-cards.

"On the 10th of April—just three months hence," answered the governor.

With his eyes fixed on a ponderous door, which he did not see, Will Sheridan made a sudden and imperative resolution.

"I shall return to Australia on that convict ship," were the words that no one heard but his own soul.

"I thank you, sir, for your courtesy and attention," he said, next moment, to the governor; "and as I wish to examine more closely the working of your system, I shall probably trouble you again."

The governor assured him that his visits to the prison would be at all times considered as complimentary; and Will Sheridan walked from Millbank with a firmer step and a more restful spirit than he had known for ten years.

VIII.

SIR JOSHUA HOBBS'S CONVICT-MILL

Lord Somers, the Colonial Secretary, had evidently conceived a high opinion of Mr. Sheridan from his first brief visit. He soon renewed the acquaintance by requesting another interview. In the course of a few weeks their relations had become almost friendly.

Their conversation was usually about the Australian colonies, on which subject the Secretary found Sheridan to be a perfect encyclopedia. It seemed that every possibility of their condition, latent as well as operative, had come into his practical mind, and had been keenly considered and laid aside.

But Sheridan was a child in London. He was supremely ignorant of everything that this nobleman considered necessary to existence. He knew nothing of British or European politics—did not even know who was Prime Minister. It gratified the genial and intelligent Englishman, on their frequent rides through the city, to impart information and pleasure to his Australian friend.

One day Mr. Sheridan received another large official letter, this time from the Chief Director of Convict Prisons, Sir Joshua Hobb, who, without apologizing for the delayed acknowledgment of Mr. Sheridan's letter, asked him to meet the Board of Directors on the next day at noon, at the Department in Parliament Street.

Sheridan kept the appointment, and became acquainted with the half-dozen men to whose hands Great Britain had intrusted the vast burden of punishing and reforming the criminal class.

Half an hour's conversation, though of a general nature astonished Will Sheridan, by convincing him of the stupendous conceit and incompetence of these men. They talked glibly about the weight of a prisoner's loaf, and the best hour to light the cells in the morning; they had statistics at their finger-tips to show how much work a convict could perform on a given number of ounces of meat; but they knew nothing whatever of the large philosophy of penal government.

The Chief Director, Sir Joshua Hobb, however, was an exception, in so far as he had ideas. He was a tall, gaunt man, of fifty, with an offensive hauteur, which was obviously from habit rather than from nature. His face said plainly: "I know all—these gentlemen know nothing—it is not necessary that they should—I am the Convict System." He reminded Sheridan of a counsellor in a narrow piece of special knowledge. He looked scornfully at Sheridan, as if to ask—"Do you mean to pretend, before me, that you know anything about prisons?"

"Confound this fellow!" said Sheridan to himself, five minutes after meeting him; "he deliberately delayed acknowledging my letters, to show his importance."

But Sir Joshua Hobb was an expert in penal systems. He had graduated from a police court, where he had begun as an attorney; and he was intimately acquainted with the criminal life of England in its details. But he had no soul for the awful thought of whence the dark stream came, nor whether it was going. He was merely a dried mudbank to keep it within bounds for a little way.

The admiration of his colleagues was almost reverential. Mr. Sheridan was informed by several of the Board—in subdued voice, of course, so that the great reformer should not be put to the blush—of his wonderful successes in the treatment of criminals.

"I feel all hate him," said Mr. Pettegrew, one of the Board—"I give you my word, sir, that every criminal in England hates the name of Sir Joshua Hobb. He has made them feel his power, sir, and they know him."

"He was knighted by the Queen for his Separate System," said another Director.

"Is that your present system?" asked Sheridan.

"No," said the Director. "At present we are on the other tack."

"The Separate System was a failure, then?" inquired Mr. Sheridan.

"Not a failure, sir, but it was abandoned out of regard to the sentimental reformers. It increased insanity from 12 to 31 per 1,000. Sir Joshua himself was the first to find it out."

"And then you adopted the Public-Works System, did you not?" asked Sheridan.

"No," said the Director. "No, not so soon. When his Separate System failed, Sir Joshua introduced the mask—a cloth skull-cap coming down over the face, with eye-holes—to promote a salutary shame in the prisoners. He was made a Knight Commander of the Bath for that wonderful invention."

"Then that system gave beneficial results?" inquired Mr. Sheridan.

"Well, there was no doubt of its moral excellence; but it increased

the insanity from 31 to 89 per 1,000. Sir Joshua himself was the first to discover this, also."

"He certainly deserves the name of a discoverer," thought Sheridan. Then aloud:

"And your present system is his invention, also?"

"Yes, our present system is wholly his. We are just now examining results. We discover one peculiarity, which Sir Joshua hardly knows how to class but he says it certainly is a proof of progress."

"May I ask what is this peculiarity?" inquired Mr. Sheridan.

"That within three years insanity has decreased 2% answered the Director," while suicide has increased 17 per 1,000."

"Sir Joshua inclines to the opinion," said another Director, who was listening, "that this fact proves that we are at last getting to bear closely on the criminal principle. The law is touching it—there is no escape—and in despair the baffled criminals give up the fight, and kill themselves."

There was something fearfully repugnant to Sheridan's broad and humane view in all this, and he would gladly have escaped from the place. But the Directors meant to impress him with their ability to manage the entire Penal System, both in Australia and England. To secure this general management, Sir Joshua Hobb had recently introduced a bill to Parliament.

"Have you heard, sir," said Sir Joshua, addressing Sheridan with a patronizing kindness, "of the proposals made to the Government as to penal reform, by Mr. Wyville, of Western Australia?"

"No," answered Sheridan, smiling at his own ignorance. "I have never even heard of Mr. Wyville."

"Indeed!" said Sir Joshua, with a stare of rude surprise. "He is the most influential man in the West Australian Penal Colony."

"I never heard his name before," simply answered Will.

"He, perhaps, resides in a district far from yours, Mr. Sheridan," said one of the Directors. "Mr. Wyville is a wealthy settler from the Vasse District."

"From the Vasse?" repeated Sheridan, quite surprised. "I thought I knew every man, rich and poor, bond and free, in that district. I have lived there many years."

Sheridan saw that his importance was lessened to the Board, but, strange to say, increased to the Chief Director, by his confession of ignorance of Mr. Wyville. However, Sir Joshua continued to speak.

"Mr. Wyville wants to introduce the sentimental idea into our penal system—an absurdity that has never been attempted. There is only one way to blend punishment with reform, sir,—by rigid rules, constant work, low diet, impersonal treatment,—and all this kept up with unflinching regularity for all the years of a prisoner's sentence."

"With educational and religious influence added, of course," suggested Mr. Sheridan.

"No, sir, not of course," said Sir Joshua, in a tone of severe correction; "a chapter of the Bible read by a warder every morning, in a regular way, may do some good; but these influences have been over-sold—the quality that is absent in the criminal class is *order*, sir, *order*; and this can best be supplied by persistent and impersonal regularity of work, meals, exercise, and sleep."

"You subject all prisoners to the same course of treatment?" asked Sheridan.

"Precisely," answered Sir Joshua. "Our system is the measure of normality, sir. We make the entire criminal or abnormal class pass through the same process of elevation, and try to reach one standard."

Mr. Sheridan would have asked what the standard was, and how many had reached it, and what had become of those who had failed to reach it, who had sunk under the Draconian yoke; but he thought it prudent to keep the questions back.

"Suppose a youth commit a first offence," he said, "or a man hitherto respectable and industrious commit a crime in a moment of passion,—will you treat him as if he were a professional criminal?"

"Precisely," repeated the eminent reformer; "our system regards criminality as a mass, and ignores its grades. This is our leading idea, sir—uniformity and justice. The criminal body is diseased—our system is the cure, sir; physician and cure in one."

Accustomed to say the word he meant, Will Sheridan could hardly restrain an indignant comment. "Confound the man," he thought, "he would take a hundred men, with as many diseases, and treat them all for the cholera." He concluded that Sir Joshua would have earned distinction as a torturer as well as a reformer, but he did not say so. As soon as possible he ended the conversation, and withdrew from the presence of the Directors of Prisons.

"Lord help the convicts!" he thought, on his way to the hotel. "No wonder they are eager to be sent to the Penal Colony."

TO BE CONTINUED

WHY BE UNINFORMED?

"No Catholic has an excuse for being uninformed about current Catholic events," says the Church Progress. "Nor can any Catholic truly claim to be posted on them who is not a faithful reader of the Catholic paper."

IN AFFLICTION'S HOUR

The evil day which poor old Kitty had so long dreaded had come at last. She was obliged to go to the workhouse. It was a place which she had always regarded with loathing and horror, and she had strained every nerve and practiced the most pitiful economies to avoid it; but, alas! all was of no avail. She had gone for three days without food, the tiny attic which she rented in the lodging house in Soho was stripped bare of furniture, for everything had gone to the pawnshop, and she owed the landlady a whole week's rent, which she must either pay at once, or be turned into the street. Alas! there was no alternative, for her strength had gone, and with it her little savings; so on a cold winter's night she had found herself shivering and penniless on the gray pavement of the inhospitable London street, where she must either lie down to starve and die, or else totter to that abode so hated by the struggling though respectable poor of which Kitty was a type. When she heard the heavy door of the workhouse bang behind her, she felt as if she were being buried alive, but she did not despair, for she belonged to the land and to the race which hold fast to hope and faith in God in the hour of deepest trial and affliction. Kitty, or to give her full name, Kitty O'Connor, had once been a happy peasant girl in the Land of Shamrocks. Her father, Myles O'Connor, was an industrious small farmer, who worked hard to bring up his family in comfort, and though the rent was high and the landlord was hard he managed to live and thrive. But, alas! black '47 came, and swept his and many another smiling home away. Father, mother, and three children fell victims to the typhus and cholera with which the country was reeking. Kitty and her sister, Mary, the only ones left, swelled the tide of emigration to England. On arriving at Liverpool, Mary was attacked by the fever and taken to a quarantine hospital, and whether she lived or died, or what became of her, Kitty could not discover, though she made the most strenuous efforts to trace her whereabouts. Those were awful times for the unfortunate Irish emigrants flying from their hapless country, and it sometimes happened, that between the plague ship and the cholera hospital, parents and children, sisters and brothers, were separated, never perhaps to see each other again.

When Kitty, after many months of weary searching, had failed to discover any trace of her sister, she followed the footsteps of many of her country people to London, and eventually found herself a resident in the Irish quarter of Soho. The little Catholic church there, dedicated to the Patron Saint of Ireland, which had been built with pennies of Irish emigrants of former years, was now thronged to its fullest extent with a crowd of worshippers speaking the soft, sweet tongue of the Gael, and Kitty was among their number. The priest, though an Englishman, was a very kind man to the helplessness and he did his best to get Kitty a situation as a domestic servant, but his efforts were fruitless, for those were the days when "no Irish need apply" was the ending of many an advertisement. The poor, however, are wonderfully kind to each other, for suffering teaches them sympathy, and by heroic sacrifices her fellow exiles subscribed sufficient pence to enable Kitty to start an apple stall, which she set up at the Oxford street end of Tottenham court road, where she thought it would be well patronized, as that was a very busy thoroughfare, and as many of her country people lived in the neighborhood.

From the first the stall was a success, for Kitty kept it spotlessly clean, and had her rosy cheeks apples always laid out in the most tempting fashion. She was, besides, kind and civil to everyone—to the ragged street urchin who came to see how much he could get for his farthing, as well as to the smart city man who sometimes put down sixpence for one or two apples selected to munch on his way to business. Her whole store was sold out nearly every evening, and early next morning she was at Covent Garden market selecting the sweetest and best looking apples, and making good bargains with the market people. Her profits were such as to enable her to lay by a "tidy penny" for herself had she wished to do so; but, though she was a very provident little mortal, and would have liked something saved for a rainy day, yet she could not see any of her poor Irish neighbors want, and all her little earnings went to their relief.

Thus the years rolled by and the comely Irish maiden, with the sweet sad face and the wonderful gray eyes, advanced in years, and became old and gray, yet all the while keeping her Irish heart as unstained as the snow on her native hills, even though she lived surrounded by the vice and pollution of perhaps the wickedest city in the world. As Kitty grew older her profits became smaller, for most of the Irish colony which had started her in business had disappeared, and she was, in consequence, not so well patronized. Besides, rival stallholders had taken away a good deal of the custom. At last she became bankrupt and had to give up the stall. After that she did a little charing to earn her living; but, alas! she was no longer young, her strength failed and now "the house," so hated by the Irish poor, claimed her as a guest, or rather as a victim; but God did not desert her.

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