

TWO

MOONDYNE JOE

THE GOLD MINE OF THE VASSE

BOOK FOURTH

THE CONVICT SHIP

VI.

THE CHILD'S GRAVE

The Houguemont, chartered by the Government to carry the convicts to Western Australia, lay in Portland Roads. She rode within the dark shadow of the gloomy cliff, upon which is built one of the greatest of the English imperial prisons. She was a large, old-fashioned merchant ship, of two thousand tons burden, a slow sailer, but a strong and roomy vessel.

She was fitted in the usual way of convict ships. Her main deck and her lower deck were divided into separate compartments, the dividing walls being heavy and strong bulkheads, while those on deck were wooden barriers about 9 feet high, with side doors, for the passage of the sailors while working the ship. At each of these doors, during the entire voyage, stood two soldiers, with fixed bayonets on their loaded rifles.

The hatch coverings opening to the lower deck, where the convicts were confined, were removed; and around each hatchway, reaching from the upper deck, or roof of the convict's room, to the lower deck or floor, was one immense grating, formed of strong iron bars. This arrangement gave plenty of air and a good deal of light, the only obstruction being the bars.

Seen from below, on the convict's deck, every hatchway stood in the centre of the ship like a great iron cage, with a door by which the wardens entered, and a ladder to reach the upper deck.

The convicts below never tired of looking upward through the bars, though they could see nothing above but the swaying ropes and the sails, and at night the beautiful sky and the stars.

In the forward and smallest compartment of the ship between decks lived the convicts who went up and down by their own hatchway. In the next, and largest compartment lived the male convicts, three hundred in number. The central compartment was the hospital; and next to this the compartment for the female convicts. The after compartment between-decks was occupied by the sixty soldiers who kept guard on the ship.

The main or upper deck was divided as follows: the after part, under the poop deck, was occupied by the state-rooms for officers and passengers, and the richly furnished cabin dining-room. Forward of this, beginning at the front of the poop, was a division of the deck to which the female convicts were allowed at certain hours of the day. The next section was the deck where the male convicts were allowed to exercise, one hundred at a time, throughout the day.

The fore part of the main-deck, running out to the bowsprit like a A, was roofed in, the angular section taking in the bowsprit. The front of this section, running across the deck, was composed of enormous bars, thicker than a man's arm, like those around the hatches, and within these bars, in sight of the male convicts on deck, were confined the malefactors or rule-breakers.

The triangular section was the punishment cell of the ship. It was entered by a ponderous door, composed of bars also. Its two rear walls were the acute angle of the ship's hull; its front was the row of bars running from side to side of the vessel, and facing aft on the main deck.

The evil-doers confined here for punishment had neither bed nor seat; they sat upon the deck, and worked at heavy tasks of oakum picking. They could not shirk, for a warden kept sentry outside the cage.

As these refractory ones looked through their bars at the deck, they saw, strapped to the foremast, a black gaff or spar with iron rings, which, when the spar was lowered horizontally, corresponded to rings screwed into the deck.

This was the triangle, where the unruly convicts were triced up and flogged every morning.

Above this triangle, tied around the foremast, was a new and very fine hempen rope, leading away to the end of the foreyard. This was the ultimate appeal, the law's last terrible engine—the halter which swung mineers and murderers out over the hissing sea to eternity.

The Houguemont had taken on board her terrible cargo. From early dawn the chains had been marching down the steep hill from Portland Prison, and passing on tugs to her deck, where the convict officers unlocked their chains, called their rolls, and sent them below to their berths.

Last of all, the female convicts had come, fifty in number, in five chains. As they stood huddled on the deck of the transport, answering to their numbers, there were hysterical sounds and wild eyes among them. At last, their chains were unlocked, and the female wardens handed to each the number of her berth, and sent her below.

Toward the end of one of the chains stood a prisoner with a white face and a strangely calm air. She did not stare around in the dazed way of her unfortunate sisters; but remained on the spot where she bade her stand, motionless. She only turned her head once, with a

smile of silent comfort to some unhappy one near her who had made the hysterical sound.

When the key came to her link of the chain and unlocked it, and she stood unshackled, another warden thrust into her hand a card, and pushed her toward the hatch. She pushed beneath the rough and needless force, and would have fallen down the open hatchway, had she not caught at a swinging rope and saved herself. As she recovered, she gave a kind of pitiful short cry or moan, and looked around bewildered, the tears springing to her eyes. The rough and busy warden again approached her, and she shrank aside in terror.

At this moment she felt a soft hand take her own, and hold it tightly. The touch restored her confidence. She turned and met the sweet face and kindly smile of Sister Cecilia. The warden at the same moment respectfully saluted the nun.

"This is my hospital assistant, warden," said Sister Cecilia, still holding Alice's hand. "She is to be allowed to go to my room."

"All right, ma'am," said the warden, who, in reality, was not harsh, but only rude and hurried in manner; "pass on, Number Four. Here!" she shouted to the next on the chain, "take this card—and down you go, quick!"

And as Alice stood aside with a great sense of relief and thankfulness, and with swimming eyes, the warden whispered to Sister Cecilia: "I'm glad she's not going among 'em—we're all glad on it."

Sister Cecilia, holding Alice's hand, led her along a narrow boarded way, at the end of which was a door opening into a pleasant room, one side of which was covered with a large medicine-case, and off which lay two bright little sleeping-rooms. When the door was closed, Sister Cecilia took Alice's white face between her hands with hearty force, and kissed her.

"Thank God, my child!" she cried, "you are safe at last!"

Alice could not speak; but she controlled herself, and kept from sobbing. She looked around wonderingly.

"This is my room, Alice," said Sister Cecilia; "my room and yours. This narrow passage is for us alone. It leads straight to the female compartment and the hospital; and no one can come here but you and I—not a soul, for the next four months. Just think of that, child! Look out that pretty little window, and say 'good-by' to gloomy old England and her prisons. We'll be all alone till we arrive in Australia—except when we are attending the sick."

Alice Walmley did not answer in words—her heart overflowed, and the little nun led her into the pleasant sleeping-room of the two, and left her, saying that this was her own room for the voyage.

When she had gone, Alice sank on her knees with a flood of feeling as seemed to melt her very heart. With eyes drowned in tears she raised her hands towards the frowning cliffs of Portland, while her quivering lips moved in yearning words.

She was saying farewell, not to England, but to that which was greater to her than England—the little spot of earth where lay the body of her dead child.

O, true heart of motherhood, that never changes, never forgets, never loses its sense of the maternal bond—once the immortal key has been struck.

"Good-by, my darling! O, if I had only one single withered blade of grass to cherish!" cried the poor mother; and as she spoke she saw clearly in her mind's eye the little neglected and forgotten grave.

"Good-by, my darling,—for ever—forever!"

She buried her face in the bed, and wept bitterly a long, Sister Cecilia came twice to the room softly, and looked in at the mourner, but did not disturb her. The second time she came, Alice was weeping with bowed head.

Sister Cecilia leant over her, and placed beside her hand a little box, covered with white paper, on which lay a sealed letter. Having done so, the Sister laid her hand caressingly on Alice's head, and withdrew quietly.

It was many minutes before Alice raised her tear-stained face. As she did so, she laid her hand on the little bed, and saw the letter. She did not heed it at first, thinking it was Sister Cecilia's. But another instant, and she had read her own name—Alice Walmley—written on a letter, and in a hand that was strangely familiar. The written name itself was not more familiar than the handwriting.

Something thrilled her as she took the little box in her hand, and opened it. She found within a piece of soft mould, in which some sweet young grass was growing, and on one side a fresh wild flower, that must have been pulled that day.

As she looked, with blurred sight, the meaning of the blessed gift poured into her heart like balm, and her thought rose up to heaven in an ecstasy of gratitude.

She did not need to look at the letter; she divined its contents. But at length she took it, and broke the seal, and read the few words it contained:

"Dear Alice,—The grass and flowers were growing this morning on your baby's grave. The wild flowers have covered it for years. I have arranged that it shall never be neglected nor disturbed.

Yours faithfully,

"WILLIAM SHERIDAN."

An hour later, Sister Cecilia entered the outer room, purposely making a noise to distract Alice's reverie. But she had to come at last and touch her arm, and take the box and the letter from her hands, before Alice realized the revelation that had come to her. She did not see it even then as a whole; but piece by piece in her mind the incredible happiness dawned upon her, that she actually had with her the precious grass, with young life in it, fresh from her darling's grave.

And later on, slowly, but by sure degrees, entered another thought, that rested like a holy thing beside this pure affection.

The last words of the letter repeated themselves like a strain of distant music in her ears: "Yours faithfully—yours faithfully"—and though the sense that was touched had in it a tone of pain and reproach that smote her, it roused her from further dwelling on her own unhappiness.

VII.

THE SAILING OF THE HOUQUEMONT

The last convict had been sent below. The barred doors in the railed hatchways were locked. The hundreds of cooped criminals mingled with each other freely for the first time in many years. The sentries had been posted at the hatches and passages on deck. The captain had shaken out the sails. The capstan had been worked until every spare link of cable was up.

The Houguemont was ready for sea. She only awaited the coming of her commander.

Mr. Wyville walked to and fro on the poop deck, casting now and again a searching glance at the pier and the steep cliff road. At length his pace became less regular, and his usually imperturbable face betrayed impatience. It was two hours past the time when the captain had engaged to be on board.

As Mr. Wyville stood looking landward, with a darkened brow, the chief warden in command of the prison officers, rapidly approached him, with an excited air, and saluted in military fashion.

"Well, Mr. Gray," said Mr. Wyville, turning, "what is it?"

"One man missing, sir! not on board—he must have slipped overboard from the soldiers, and attempted to swim ashore."

"When did he come on board?"

"With the last chain, sir."

"Then he must be in the water still. He would strike for the mainland, not for the island."

As he spoke, a soldier who had run up the rigging shouted that there was a hamper or basket floating a short distance astern of the ship.

Mr. Wyville asked one of the ship's officers for a glass, which he levelled at the floating hamper. He saw that it indeed obliged toward the shore of the mainland, though a strong tide was setting in the contrary direction, toward the island. He lowered the glass with a saddened air.

"Poor fellow!" he murmured, shutting the glass, irresolutely. He knew that the absconder, finding the floating hamper, had placed it over his head in order to escape the eyes of the guards. As he laid down the telescope, a rifle shot rang from the mainmast, and the water leaped in a jet of spray within a foot of the basket.

Next instant, came two reports, the basket was knocked on its side, and all on the deck of the convict ship plainly saw a man swimming in the sea. One of the bullets had struck him, evidently, for he shouted, and dashed about wildly.

All this had happened in a few seconds. The shots had followed each other as rapidly as fire-arms. At the second shot, Mr. Wyville looked at the soldiers with a face aflame with indignation. As the third shot rang out, he shouted to the soldiers; but his voice was drowned in the report.

Next moment, he saw the levelled rifle of another soldier, and heard the officer directing his aim. With-out a word, Mr. Wyville seized the long and heavy marine telescope, which he had laid on the rack, and, balancing himself on the poop, for an instant, he hurled the glass like a missile from a catapult right into the group of soldiers on the top.

The missile struck lengthwise against the rifleman, and knocked him toward the mast, his weapon going off harmlessly in the air. Consternation seized the others, and the young officer began an indignant and loud demand as to who had dared assault his men.

"Come down, sir," said Mr. Wyville, sternly, "and receive your orders before you act."

The subaltern came down, and joined Mr. Wyville on the poop, saluting him as he approached.

"I was not aware, sir," he said, "that I was to wait for orders in cases of mutiny or escape."

"This man could be overtaken," said Mr. Wyville: "your guards allowed him to escape; and you have no right to kill him for escaping, if the law had no right to kill him for his crime."

As he spoke, he brought the glass to bear on the unfortunate wretch in the water, to whom a boat was now sweeping with swift stroke.

"My God!" he said, putting down the glass, and turning from the officer; "the man is drowned!"

The struggling swimmer, spent with previous exertions, had been struck by a bullet in the shoulder; and though the wound was not mortal, it rapidly spent his remaining strength. Before the boat had reached him the poor fellow had thrown up his arms and sunk. His body was found and taken to the ship.

During this scene, Captain Draper had come on deck, unobserved. He had passed quite close to Mr. Wyville as he spoke severely to the military officer. A few minutes later, when Mr. Wyville stood alone, the captain approached him.

"Am I supposed to command this ship, or to take orders also?" he asked, not offensively, but with his usual hybrid smile.

Mr. Wyville remained silent a moment, as if undecided. The recent shocking event had somewhat changed his plans.

"You command the ship, sir," he said, slowly, and fixing his eyes on Captain Draper's face, "under me. So long as your duty is done, no interference will be possible. It may be well to understand now, however, that there is a higher authority than yours on board."

Captain Draper bowed; then turning to his chief officer, who had heard the conversation, he gave orders for sailing.

TO BE CONTINUED

"LEST YE BE JUDGED"

Neither of the twain were remarkably endowed in any particular sense. Yet he earnest, youthful, ambitious and passively handsome, and she with her beauty and brains and sweet, unspoiled disposition, made a couple happily met indeed. The one incongruity was his irresponsibility, all the more flagrant in contrast to her constancy of faith.

When he left the dreamy little village both called home it was whispered that she had denied his suit because of this oddity. Be this as it may, a wistful look came into the girl's fine dark eyes as his absence was prolonged.

A year, two years, five years, eight years passed, and this woman, obviously desirable and worthy, remained unwed. Then came his homecoming, unexpected as had been his departure. Most unexpected was his attendance at Mass on the following Sunday and on all the Sundays thereafter. How much this meant to her, he also was permitted to know. They took up their friendship again, just where they had left it.

He secured a position in the town's best bank and for two years he filled it faithfully. During that time he harbored no company, unadmitted. On pleasant evenings they sat together on the broad veranda of her pretty home. On Sundays they followed the shady street that led to St. Xavier's.

At length, when he had been named for a better place, he left the bank to make business ventures of his own. That evening he told her of his intentions.

"And you didn't tell me before," she reminded him reproachfully. "But, of course, you don't tell me all that you might."

"In this matter I decided rather suddenly," he replied. "What else have I withheld?"

"You have never told me, and surely you realize that I would like to know how you became devoted to your present convictions after having harbored opinions so vastly different." She paused a moment; then, perceiving his hesitation, she hastened to add: "Really, on second thought, the reason is of no great import. That you chose the better way and that you persevere in following it, should be—"

"I must tell you a story," he interrupted. "I've wanted to tell it for a long time, but I couldn't until I had proved to you both know—let us call them Westons."

"Many years ago this fellow, Weston, went down the big river in the hope of finding the success he craved. He tried to take up the life of the Southland but his reception was not just what he would have had. Memories of Sherman and Grant were yet vivid, and the Northerner was looked upon as an outsider. At least, Weston felt that he was so regarded."

"So it happened that, though his persistency and fidelity won a fairly good position with a bank, he could not rise above the limit of a definite place and wage. At length he became embittered against existing conditions.

"While spending an hour on the river front he saw something that gave rise to an idea that later became an obsession. His idea was to go North and build a substantial house-boat, then, in company with his big waters, away from everything suggestive of failure and disappointment. So absorbing did this desire become that at last it resolved itself into a question of funds.

"Well, a wave of prosperity swept over that portion of the South, networks of steel and bulks of stone arose on every side. Contractors were required to give cash security before beginning work. One firm was required to deposit \$60,000 before being awarded the building of a palatial hotel.

"It was Weston who placed the unpretentious little parcel in the safety vault after applying the usual label: 'Surety bonds for, etc.' Then the incident passed from his mind, for it was but a part of his daily work.

"That afternoon the president told him that he might consider the following day as the beginning of his vacation.

"That night temptation grew strong—his trip would require means. Others might spend hundreds, thousands, wantonly. Others might waste years, even a lifetime, in pursuit of pleasure while he—a mad pulse

raced at his temples; he allowed himself to consider the possibilities offered by that package of bank notes."

"For a time the man was silent, as if in doubt just how to continue. "I need not tell you of his struggle," he said slowly, "a struggle all the more dreadful because of the dishonor of defeat. He took advantage of the confidence placed in him, visited the bank and took away the parcel.

"Nor need I tell you of his trip northward, his tools and supplies, his labor at boat building, up where the great river is all but lost in the silent heart of the evergreen forests. When completed the boat was little more than a huge raft, surmounted by a small cabin of rough logs. But Weston viewed it with pride and, at last, admitted, settled himself to the enjoyment of the balm of solitude.

"Pink-flecked lilies, islands of foam and bits of driftwood floated alongside the raft. Great bulks rose in the distance, towered for a time over the houseboat, and finally melted into nothingness in its wake. The great peace of the forest and river cast its soothing spell over all through the dreamy days and chill nights whose velvety darkness seemed to crowd Weston's entire world into the ill-lit little cabin.

"After the hills and woodlands came stretches of tawny prairie. The first villages were small and as new as the West itself. Farther on they were larger, and the newness seemed tarnished. Then came towns, quite old. And just as the first yellows of October tinged the clear skies, the pearly spires and grimy chimneys of Lacede's city hove into view.

"Weston's journey must end at St. Louis. It would be unwise to go further south. This thought begot others, and in the summing up he felt the first real qualm of conscience. Not because his industrial future was ruined—he had a fortune in the little parcel under his bunk, the parcel still unopened. Yet how dare he touch—"

"The qualm developed rapidly. "He moored his craft at the St. Louis water front, and sent a negro in quest of newspapers. While he waited and pondered what disposition of the funds would least excite suspicion, a heavy hand was placed on his shoulder. Turning, he faced a big stalwart man whom he recalled having seen about the bank down south. Instantly he realized that the man was a secret agent.

"I've been searching every house-boat for a week," he said brusquely. "Did you just come in?"

"Yes," Weston admitted, with a cruel suddenness, the dreadful significance of the whole affair was forced upon him. "Yes, just arrived, he added in a voice so faint that the other inquired if he were ill.

"The cashier wants you," the big fellow went on. "Says he can't get along without you."

"Yes, of course," Weston answered resignedly.

"How tactful this detective was!" Weston thought. "That young Adams, your assistant, can't keep the books in ship-shape. The boss says when you get em lined up 'y' can have another week off down to N' Orleans, or somewhere."

"Yes, yes, I understand," Weston stammered. "Quite nice of him. Do we start at once?"

"Oh, I'm not going" with you, Mr. Weston. I'm on other business. They just told me to watch 'fr you while I was up here."

"Weston tried not to look as incredulous as he felt. "How did they know where I was going?" he gasped.

"You left a map showin' your route, and some sketches of your shanty boat. Adams found 'em in the desk."

"Yes, I remember leaving them there," Weston admitted, marveling at the stupidity he had displayed.

"Better get off the river," cautioned his visitor, as he betook himself up the cobble water front. "You're lookin' pale; malaria mebbe."

"May be, and may not be," Weston mused, unable to grasp the meaning of it all. Clodpaths that he was, he had left evidence of his exact whereabouts. And when they found him, they didn't—"

"Then the truth dawned upon him. The contract was yet unfulfilled, and the bonds had neither been forfeited nor reclaimed. Hence, their loss had not been discovered.

"He sat thinking far into the night. The lights and roar of the city were above him and the tireless waters rushed below. But his mind was on neither. A big new idea possessed him. The outgoing night train had thundered over the bridge before he sought the rest which his thoughts lightened by a fine resolution, allowed him to enjoy.

"In the morning, true to his resolve, he set about to return the little parcel. In his nervous grasp it broke open, and the contents were scattered over the floor—a litter of crumpled newspapers!

"In a trice, he understood. A certified check had been given for the bond. The false parcel, and so on, were merely legal formalities attending the filing and signing of the contract before witnesses.

"Somehow, the salvation from a taint of name if not of heart, affected him strangely. It was the biggest event of his life. That is how—er, well, you see, he took it to heart and determined to live up to it. He began looking into matters that he had long overlooked. Finally, it was given him to see a way that led to better things, and to find such Help as would enable him to avoid a reputation of his dire mistake.

"Emboldened by the new Help, something finer and better than he had before ever known, he became trustful, confident, certain. Yet, to prove himself strengthened against the weakness he had once displayed he again sought a position of trust. The proof was gratifying and—"

He ceased speaking and turned to the woman, as if to await the verdict she must render.

"Of course Weston's action was unwise, inexcusably so," she said quietly, almost impersonally. "Yet, I am sure that his great failure is to become the cornerstone of a well-built life. And when I was reminded of his blind groping—of the futility of his earnest, but misdirected, efforts—and of the hopelessness that beset him, I must also remember," she paused.

"Lest ye be judged."

He was moved to cry out against this thing that so clouded his past as to make him feel unworthy of esteem from this woman so generously gifted in all that was good and beautiful and lovable. Her rare charity silenced him.

"If Weston hadn't decided to rectify his mistake he would be deserving of censure," she conceded. "I admire him for choosing the one way assuring his future safety."

"That's why I waited so long," he interrupted, a sudden smile of relief relaxing his tense features. "And now," a tremor of appeal, wondrously tender and wistful, hushed his voice until it was but a whisper, lost, as indeed it should have been, to the world, save the one loyal, deserving heart.

Through tears of long deferred happiness, she smiled assent to his entreaties.

"Yes, at Easter," she agreed. "It's near, almost too near. But I never favored long engagements," she naively commented.—Charles J. H. Sheehan, in the Magnificat.

GENERAL INTENTION FOR OCTOBER

RECOMMENDED AND BLESSED BY HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XV.

THE LEAGUE IN PARISHES

In the words of the Apostle St. Paul, "Let this be in you, that is in Christ Jesus" (Phil. ii, 5), may be found in its entirety the spirit of the Apostleship of Prayer, or League of the Sacred Heart, as it is better known in Canada. Its object is to establish between all Christians and their Divine Head a complete fusion of sentiments and interests, to urge them to make their own His desires and intentions, to help them to unite their prayers to His, to show them how this may be done, and thus cooperate with Him in the sublime work which He began to do on earth and which He still continues to do in His eucharistic life, namely, the salvation of souls.

The League of the Sacred Heart is, properly speaking, a league of prayer, a prayerful apostolate, easily understood and easily organized among Catholics. Membership in the League is not restricted to the devout and the edifying; everybody is invited to join it; and everybody becomes interested. The introduction of the League into a parish does not stifle the activities of other societies already established; on the contrary, it aids them enormously by stimulating careless Catholics, by teaching them how to spiritualize their lives more efficaciously by infusing into them greater prayerfulness and apostolic zeal. A new spirit enters a parish with the League; Catholics feel more keenly that they belong to a Universal Church; they get a clearer and more practical idea of their dignity as Catholics and of their obligations. When the League is solidly established in a parish, its influence is soon felt both in the personal piety of its members and in their zeal for the spiritual welfare of their neighbors.

And yet in the League no obligations are assumed, no practices undertaken that are unusual in ordinary Catholic life; merely a new direction is given, new life is infused into duties poorly done, and loftier aims are put before the faithful. The League shows Catholics how all their works, even the most trivial, may acquire supernatural profit; it teaches them how to lead more meritorious lives, how they may pray even while they work, how they may exercise a real apostolate among souls.

The lives of most of us are made up of small things. Our days and weeks, our months and years, our whole careers, in fact, are nothing but a series of little deeds done one after the other. If we learn the secret of turning these little deeds into prayers we acquire merit every minute; our lives become one continuous act of vital prayer. This is precisely what the League of the Sacred Heart teaches us to do. We offer up our daily works and sufferings to God, and this daily offering gives them a supernatural character. As members of the League we learn the great secret how to "pray always"; we learn that any act no matter how indifferent in itself, for instance, preparing a meal, plowing a furrow, writing a letter, making a journey, and so on, may become a prayer in the sight of God. These simple acts, when performed in a state of grace and with the supernatural motive which the League furnishes, are endowed through the merits of Christ with a threefold virtue: First, they please God and secure an increase of

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