

"Liver Trouble so Severe I Had to Quit Work"

Mr. Thomas Honey, Bramford, Ont., writes:
"I was a great sufferer from enlargement of the liver for ten months, and finally I had to quit work. I would wake up in the mornings with a bitter taste in my mouth, had frequent headaches, yellow complexion, and pain in my right side, and between the shoulder blades. It was almost unbearable, and terribly weakening. I could not sleep at night and my heart also bothered me. But the whole trouble has now left me, thanks to that wonderful medicine, Dr. Chase's Kidney-Liver Pills."

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Opera House

MONDAY & TUESDAY

DECEMBER 15th, & 16th.

"The Clean Heart"

--OR--

"The Cruelties of Life"

--BY--

A. S. M. Hutchinson

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ADMISSION Adults 21c Children 11c

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"The Man They Could Not Hang"

Prison talks with John Lee, whose remarkable escapes from the Scaffold have been the talk of Continents.

Thomas Churchill, the writer of this article, was sentenced to penal servitude for life for manslaughter but by reason of his good conduct he was liberated at the end of fifteen years. He was sent to Portland Prison and while there he made a friend of John Lee, of Babbacombe, THE MAN THEY COULD NOT HANG, about whom he has much that is interesting and new to tell.

When I read of the various reforms that are now taking effect in English and Scottish prisons, my thoughts go back to the nightmare days when I spent fifteen years at Portland. It was at this convict settlement that I met John Lee, the man they could not hang. Three times they tried to hang John Lee, for the Babbacombe murder, and three times they failed. His sentence was then commuted to penal servitude for life, and he was sent to Portland where after a long term of prison life, he was released. Known as the Prison on the Cliffs, Portland is, and always has been, the most unpopular prison in England save with the exception of Dartmoor. The prison itself is an imposing, though grim-looking block of buildings perched on the rocky frowning cliffs of the Portland peninsula, and standing nearly five hundred feet above the sea.

Small wonder then that one man who had spent the best part of his life in exile there should describe it as "a place designed by nature for the imprisonment of human beings." I was not a stranger to Portland for two years before I made my terrible slip in life I was one of the soldier guards at the prison but was bought out of the army later by my parents. I was then only in my teens. What a contrast there now was! Someone must guard me. For a while I thought the place would drive me insane. Words fail to describe the dullness and monotony of a convict's life there, right away from communion with his fellow men.

John Lee, the man they could not hang, had been there for some time before I arrived. It was at work that he and I were first thrown together, and I learned the whole circumstances of his remarkable escape from death on the gallows. He was a well-known figure of the prison for his case, the most astounding in criminal annals, had created a sensation throughout the country.

Behind the warden's back John and myself used to speak a lot to one another, and before he was released we had become sworn pals. It was at the age of 23 that Lee, whilst in the employ of Miss Emma Keyse, at one time maid-of-honor to Queen Victoria, was accused and found guilty on circumstantial evidence of murdering his mistress in her home at Babbacombe.

He always protested his innocence of the crime and in conversation I had with him he related some most remarkable facts including a strange dream he had on the

night before he was to have met the judgment of the law.

"If I had to think much of that awful experience" John told me one day "it would drive me mad. It was a dream I had on what was to be my last night on earth that convinced me that the hanging would not take place. In that dream I saw my own grave as I was on my way to the scaffold. I saw it again later and it was still empty. I knew then that the drop had failed and I was not to be hanged. Next morning I told the warders of my dream, and also Berry the executioner but they didn't say anything except to tell me to get ready to meet my doom."

Lee then told me of how he was pinioned and led to the execution shed and how the officials present seemed to have a foreboding that there would be a hitch to add agony to the tragic scene.

"I was placed on the drop" Lee told me "and soon I felt the trap doors quivering under my feet but they did not fall away. I was removed from the scaffold whilst an attempt was made to adjust matters and then again I was stood on the brink of death." Lee then went on to tell me how the drop failed again, and after being half strangled with the noose around his neck he was released again. "The agony of the suspense was awful" he said "They offered me brandy, but I refused, and told them to get on with it. But after they had tried a third time and failed I was taken back to my cell, and later told that my sentence had been commuted to penal servitude for life. I felt it was my dream come true."

In his protestations of innocence John Lee told me that he had heard that a certain other person, a woman, had confessed to the Church Army official that she was guilty of the crime, but nothing ever came of this, although John petitioned the Home Secretary several times with a view to having his sentence reviewed and the facts of the case reconsidered.

How John Lee and I became such friends was like this. During my term the Home Secretary at that time granted all convicts who had served seven and a half years in prison, the privilege of earning a little more gratuity. Half of this money we were allowed to spend in the prison canteen on such little luxuries as butter, cheese, jams, sweets, biscuits, oranges and other things with the exception of tobacco which I never had a chance to smoke during the whole of my fifteen years.

These men were also given permission to speak and walk in couples on the exercise ground. Both John Lee and myself came in for these little privileges. At first John would not converse with any one and used to walk on his lonesome, behind the rest of us. I had not seen John for some time before this privilege took effect and so could not guess the reason why he wanted to walk by himself until I had had an opportunity to drop him a word or two. Then it was that he said he wanted to walk with me as he had known me previously. I was paired off with another prisoner at the time but when the Governor got to know the reason why John, whose prison number was L-150 walked by himself, he gave us permission to be mated. John was satisfied after that and we had many a pleasant chat together. After hearing all that John had got to say, I must say that I came to the conclusion that he was suffering for another's crime. He was so sincere in his protestations of innocence and never seemed filled with the remorse that comes at some time or another to men who have committed murder. Few men, I am sure could have gone through the ordeal and lived as John did. When he was released, he returned to Babbacombe to wed the woman he had loved as a boy, and who, being living in his innocence, had waited all those long years for his release.

John Lee, was released some years before I got out, and before he left I had him promise to visit my mother, who was living in Manchester. That promise he faithfully kept, and although I have not seen him since, I still think of



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