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THE QUEEN'S PARDON

By Clive Holland.

ON the Heights of Portland the December mist, still undispersed by sunrise, hung thick, obliterating all traces of the prison buildings from the roads, where several ships of the channel squadron lay at anchor, and also from the straggling row of houses at the base of the northwest slope.

In the prison itself there was no light as yet save in the corridors, up and down which the ever-alert wardens paced monotonously to and fro. In most of the cells the prisoners slept, tired out with the previous day's hewing of stone and uncongenial tasks; but in one the occupant, a man of thirty-five, good-looking in spite of prison garb, close-cropped hair, and the ravages of toil and despair, lay on his bed awake.

A little more than ten years ago he had stood in the dock of a west of England city listening to a judge with a hard voice, though with kindly eyes, pronouncing sentence of fifteen years' penal servitude. All that an eloquent counsel could do had been done for him, but to no avail. The evidence seemed conclusively damnatory, and the foreman of the jury, after an absence of half an hour, answered "guilty" to the usual question with a ring of conviction in his voice. The judge's words to Thomas Harborde fell on deaf ears. He stood stupidly gazing at a young girl sitting at the back of the court in company of a sweet-faced old lady, as though he saw nothing.

At last a warder touched him on the shoulder, and the same instant a piteous cry of, "O, Tom! Tom! They're going to take you away from me," rang out in the court, over which the dusk of late afternoon was creeping, gradually blotting out the features of those who sat at all in shadow. The prisoner turned round as though about to say something to the judge on the bench, and then, led by the warder, he vanished down the dock stairs to the cells, to be known no longer as Thomas Harborde, but by various numbers: At Portland convict prison as "No. 27."

The sense of innocence brought him no meed of satisfaction; it merely filled him with desperate wrath and blackest despair. In the early period of his solitary confinement he found himself confronted day in and out with the crushing sense of legions of hours, minutes and seconds before he could hope to be a free man—if ever he were to be one again. By good conduct—against the very thought of which he at first rebelled, refusing to accept any boon at the hands of fate—he might reduce these years to two-thirds maybe. What then, millions of seconds, each one to him, a prisoner, an appreciable part of life; hundreds of thousands of leaden-footed minutes, each one filled with a poignant despair, must pass ere the time of release drew near. At work, under the scorching sun or in the keen air of winter, in the quarries it was all the same. These hours and minutes became embodied in the persons of the warders and fellow-prisoners, in the presence of his chains.

From a possibly dangerous man he became almost an inanimate machine; a mere cogwheel in the round of daily toil and prison discipline. At first he attacked the stone as though he were revenging his wrongs upon human flesh and blood; at last he tooled it with the unthinking regularity of an automaton. It takes a year or two to trample the human element out of a man of Harborde's type; but the effect of stone walls, silence and brutalized companions, if slow, is none the less sure. Only in his case he became an automaton instead of an animal.

Through the long December night, while the mist enshrouded Portland and restricted the range of lights at the Bill to half a mile or less, and while the sirens resounded from the lighthouse gallery almost continuously, answered faintly by others from vessels far out at sea, or booming harshly from others near at hand, Harborde lay awake reckoning the weeks, days, hours and minutes which comprised the remaining two years of his term. He had just dropped off into a half-sleeping condition when his cell door opened, and instead of the hard face of the warder come to tell him to tidy up, he saw the governor and chaplain, with the warder in the background.

What could it mean? He sprang up, rubbing his eyes, and almost before he knew what was happening the governor had told him in a few words that he had received the Queen's pardon, and then proceeded to read the same. What did it all mean? No other thought germinated in his dulled brain. Free! Free to go where he willed! Free to walk out of the jail gates! Never to return within the stone walls which had shut him in from the outside world, as surely as though no other world than that contained within them existed.

The prison bell clanged, startling him into a state of wakefulness. The governor had finished reading the official-looking paper, and with the conclusion of the formal part of his duty he added a few words of congratulation. Harborde seemed to have no comprehension of their meaning. He remained standing in the centre of the narrow cell speechless. At last the chaplain made him understand the import of the document which had just been read over to him.

"Free! Free! It is impossible," he exclaimed, and then he threw himself on the bed in an agony of joy. The clanging of the bell afresh, the slamming of doors, the echoing of footsteps down the resounding corridors, recalled him to a sense of his position. A warder entered with a suit of clothes. With trembling fingers he removed his prison garb; worn, soiled with weather and labor and intolerable. The trousers felt chilly after the thick, tight-fitting knickerbockers, and rough, thick worsted stockings. The coat seemed to fit him nowhere. With one look round his cell, on the walls of which he had done innumerable calculations to keep himself from insanity bred by the terrible silence and sense of loneliness, "No. 27" now no longer a mere figure, a machine, but a human being, stepped into the corridor.

There was a breakfast for him such as he had not tasted for nine long years, but he had no appetite. The one idea now possessing his mind was home, escape whilst the governor was willing for him to depart. He swallowed a few mouthfuls, drank a few gulps of cocoa, and then with the allowance money in his pocket hurried to the gateway.

He was free. Free to go wherever he liked. Free to start for home as fast as steam could carry him. Free to stretch out his arms to the placid gray-blue waters of Western Bay now denuded of their mantle of fog and sparkling in the sunshine. Free to breathe the pure air uncontaminated by companions criminal and vicious. But the waters, the hillside, the lovely stretch of verdant country extended before his eyes, had no charm for him save that they spelt freedom. Behind him lay the prison house, the flagstaff from which no ensign of dread fluttered to tell of his escape. Before him lay freedom.

He rushed down the road, waving his arms with the reawakened instincts of a boy escaping from school, oblivious alike to the sympathetic gaze of women he passed, and the half-contemptuous remarks of the men. He dashed into the bleak, shabby little railway station, only to learn that there was no train for an hour. Already his limbs, unused to such riotous movements and still feeling the lag of the chain, had begun to fail him, making the half-jocular suggestion of the solitary reporter, that he should "take a little exercise and walk to Weymouth," out of the question.

"I'll have to wait," was all he could think of to say.

"Doin' time ain't altogether exhilarating' or strengthenin' work," the porter remarked.

Harborde nodded his head, yet longed to tell him he was an innocent man. The porter, however, had vanished, to return in a few moments with a paper.

"Here, mate," he exclaimed, with rough kindness. "You won't know all yesterday's news, I'll go bail."

Harborde seized the paper. No! he knew nothing of yesterday's news, nor that of thousands of days which had once been yesterday. He could see nothing at first. The print swam in a confused jumble before his eyes, then as his sight cleared he commenced to read. How strange it was! He used to be a great reader before he became "No. 27." And now he seemed to know nothing of the world. New names confronted him everywhere. Names of those in authority, names of towns, names even of countries. Where was Mashonaland and Matabeleland? He was confused. He read on. This delicious new found turmoil of the world, how good it was after all.

At last his eye caught a small paragraph stowed away at the bottom of the third column on page six of the paper. He read and reread it over and over again. "Her Majesty, the Queen, has been graciously pleased to pardon Thomas Harborde, who was convicted of forgery at the Winchester assizes some ten years ago, and who is now completing his sentence of fifteen years' penal servitude at Portland. Harborde will be released this morning. The step has been taken in consequence of the dying confession of a man at Bristol." Nothing more! Now he knew why he had been released. And so death had taken Edward Tilwell out of the hands of justice. It was hardly fair of death.

The porter came up whistling to tell him the train would start in ten minutes. He got up, thrust the paper into the man's hands, and pointed to the paragraph.

"That's me."

"You Thomas Harborde?" exclaimed the man. "Then all I've got to say is it's a hanged shame the Queen didn't send a coach-and-six for you. Let's have your hand, man, to wish you good luck. Got a missis? No? So much the better; poor soul, if you had, it would cut her up terrible."

"No," said Harborde, as though speaking to himself, "I was to have been married; but that's years ago now, and I'm an old man."

"Old!" interjected the porter, "you're no more than five-and-thirty, I'll go bail. You do look older, to be sure. But wait till you've been out a bit, you'll soon rub off them lines and look a bit more uppish."

The engine at the end of the short train of carriages relegated to the Portland line after becoming too thoroughly out of date for even the Somerset and Dorset local service between Weymouth and Dorchester, gave a thin, wintry squeak, and Harborde, in a fever of apprehension lest it should start without him, tumbled into the first carriage that came handy, ticketless.

The porter came to the door. "You've got no ticket. Here, give me a shilling, and I'll get it for you. Book to Weymouth?"

"Yes," said Harborde, fumbling in his pocket for the money.

"Now you're all right," the porter exclaimed, returning a couple of minutes later; "here's the ticket and the change. No, thanks; you'll want all you've got. Good-bye, mate, and good luck."

With a bump and a groan the train moved out of the station and ambled along the line running at the back of Chesil Beach at the rate of eight or ten miles an hour. Harborde was one of half a dozen passengers, but there was no one else in his compartment. He sat thinking of all that had happened. He had heard nothing of those at home for many months; they might all be dead. How would he have the courage to go to the door with this possibility? What would he do if Jane told him his mother was dead? He covered his face in his hands at the thought, and sobbed as only a strong man can sob in the corner of a carriage. With a great jerk the train pulled up at the station, and Harborde got out. His fellow-travelers regarded him with curiosity because his friend, the porter, had told every one of them who he was when he examined their tickets, inveighing bitterly the while against the caustic humor of pardoning an innocent man.

Harborde noticed nothing of this. He inquired of a porter the next train on to the junction for Applebury, and then discovered that he was both hungry and faint for want of food. He went out into the slippery, muddy street at the back of the house on the Parade, and at length found a quiet little eating house, where he was served with a meal by a girl who had a pitying eye, after consultation with her superior in command. At 3 o'clock he was again on his way in the train, in the company this time of other fellow creatures, who one and all regarded him with a feeling akin to that with which they would have submitted to the company of a dangerous animal. Harborde noticed it after a time, and putting his hand to his head suddenly made the discovery that his hair was noticeably short. After this he realized that he was a marked man, and no longer wondered why the lady opposite drew her warm plaid dress away from his feet, and the other lady with two children sidled as far from him as possible, and asked the guard to find her seats in another carriage at the next station.

He was innocent, but how could he explain it to them? If they could but know how he had suffered surely they would weep. He hadn't the paper with him; even if he had perhaps they would not believe that he and the Thomas Harborde mentioned in the paragraph were one and the same. Two men got in where the lady with the children got out. They each of them threw him a glance, shrugged their shoulders and then became immersed in their papers.

It was quite dark when Applebury was reached and Harborde, luggageless, speedily passed out of the station without being recognized. There seemed little alteration in the place. Several of the shops—now gay with Christmas goods and finery—in the main street now had large plate-glass windows in place of more countrified fronts, but were otherwise much as fifteen years ago. For a moment he stood confused, staring up and down the street, regarded by the passers-by with curiosity. Then he remembered that he would have to go along the street, past the grocer's whose window projected a yard into the footpath, turn down the by-street, and then again turning take the road leading to his home.

In ten minutes he reached the garden gate. He had run part of the way, and now he could not make up his mind to go up the drive to the door. What if they were all dead? He grew sick at the very idea. There was a light in his mother's room, which was at the front of the house. What if she was ill—perhaps dying? At last his legs carried him up the drive which swept around the little front lawn in a semi-circle. He heard the bell tinkle shrilly at the back of the house. The sound seemed like home. All at once he remembered how, years ago, he banged it with a long-handled broom till it jangled against its fellow on either side.

The door opened. A flood of light streamed out on to the gravel. It was a strange face, and the face sent an icy shock to his heart. Far outside himself he heard a voice he did not recognize as his own asking if Dr. Harborde were in. A year seemed to pass before the servant said: "No;" adding, "did you wish to see him particular?"

"Yes."

"He'll be in in half an hour."

"Is—is Mrs. Harborde in? Is she alive?" said the man at the door, throwing the words at her when once his tongue consented to frame them.

"Why, Lor' bless me, yes! Come, none of that."

But it was no use. The man she had just noticed had suspiciously short hair and a strange, wild-looking face, had pushed past her, thrown open the sitting-room door, stumbled into it and thrown his arms around a sweet-faced old lady who rose in alarm at his sudden entrance.

"My son! my son?" rang out through the house. "Mother! mother!"

The girl stood rooted to the spot, then she ran to Jane, and the two of them came out into the passage. In the sitting-room with its pink-shaded lamp a woman was seated kissing every line on her son's face—every line that the long years had written. And he stroked the hair that still lay thick, though white, in a coil at the back of her head.

Suddenly the man started up.

"Jess?" he asked, huskily.

Some one who had lain, half-stunned with joy, in a wicker chair well out of the range of the lamp-light, came into his vision.

"Jess!" he cried, folding her in his arms whilst the room swam round, "my Jess!"

"Tom!" came the answer.

"But I am old," said he; "so old."

"And I also, with the sadness and loneliness of waiting. But now—now I am young again."

The voice of the elder woman broke the silence after a moment: "For this my son was dead and is alive again."

And they began to be merry.—Black and White.

Baby carriages are not permitted in the streets of Berlin chiefly devoted to shopping.

It is predicted that by the year 2000 from 200 to 300 new foods will be at man's service.

WHAT "LLOYD'S MEANS"

The Corporation Provides Insurance Brokers a Place to Meet Customers.

Lloyd's dates from the latter part of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and had its origin in a small coffee house in Tower street, kept by Edward Lloyd. He was an enterprising man, and through his business contact with seafaring men and merchants enlisted in foreign trade, saw the importance of improving shipping and the method of marine insurance. He was the founder of the system of maritime and commercial intelligence which has been developed into its present effectiveness. Before the time of Edward Lloyd maritime insurance in England was conducted by the Lombards, some Italians, who founded Lombard street, but after Lloyd embarked in the business Britons conducted marine insurance in London.

The subjects of marine insurance are the ship, the cargo, and the freight, all of which may belong to different parties. In time of war there is what is termed the maritime risk—the danger from accident, collision and stranding—which is distinctly separate from the risk of capture and seizure by an enemy. This class of marine insurance had its inception in the conditions arising during the seven-year French-English war of 1757 to 1763.

Lloyd's moved to Pope's Head alley in 1770, and in 1774 removed to the present quarters in the Royal Exchange. In 1871 Lloyd's was incorporated by act of Parliament. This act defined the objects of the society to be: (1) The carrying on of the business of marine insurance by members of the society; (2) the protection of the interests of members of the society in respect of shipping, cargoes and freights; (3) the collection, publication and diffusion of intelligence and information with respect to shipping.

The corporation of Lloyd's and the committee of Lloyd's, who are the executive body of the corporation, and the secretary of Lloyd's, have practically nothing to do with marine insurance in the way of taking risks or paying losses. Their duty in this respect is to afford marine insurance brokers who wish to effect insurances a place of meeting with those who undertake the risks.—Scientific American.

What Can a Boy Do?

This is what a boy can do, because boys have done it:

He can write a poem. Alexander Pope wrote his famous "Ode to Solitude" when he was only twelve years old.

He can write a great book. Macauley wrote his first volume, the "Primaiae," which took the literary world by storm, before he was in his teens.

He can write a successful play. Jon O'Keefe, the famous Irish actor and playwright, wrote a play that is considered good to-day, when he was only fifteen.

He can become famous. Charles Dickens did his "Sketches by Boz" so well that before he was twenty-two his name was known to all the world.

He can "make his mark" so well that it will open his career. Palmerton, England's great statesman, was admired in school for his brilliant work, and wrote letters home in English, French and Italian that are models of composition to-day.

He can enter a great university before he is thirteen. William Pitt did it.—Louisville Courier-Journal.

Coleridge the Soldier.

Subsistence could not, however, be made on the reading and writing of pamphlets, nor the means of livelihood obtained by the most eloquent and entrancing of conversations, and Coleridge, finding himself both forlorn and destitute in London, enlisted as a soldier in the Fifteenth (Elliot's) Life Dragoons.

"On his arrival at the quarters of the regiment," says his friend and biographer, Mr. Gillman, "the General of the district inspected the recruits, and looking hard at Coleridge with a military air inquired, 'What's your name, sir?' 'Comberbach' (the name he had assumed). 'What do you come here for, sir?' as if doubting whether he had any business there. 'Sir,' said Coleridge, 'for what most persons come—to be made a soldier.' 'Do you think,' said the General, 'you can run a Frenchman through the body?' 'I do not know,' replied Coleridge, 'as I have never tried; but I'll let the Frenchman run me through the body before I'll run away.' 'That will do,' said the General, and Coleridge was turned into the ranks."—English House Beautiful.