

SOME PRISON FRIENDS OF MINE—By JULIAN HAWTHORNE

antness, and with some who had been prisoners for a long time, a sort of childlikeness. But it was the childlikeness of a person partly dazed, or recovering from a severe illness or shock.

They greeted one another with a covert smile, and unobtrusive movement of head or hand; only when under direct observation of an official would they pass without a sign. The usual word were, "How're you feeling?" or, "How're they comin'?" not in the perfunctory tone of greetings in the outer world, but with an accent of real interest and solicitude. The answer would be, "Good!" "Fine!" with as much heartiness as could be thrown into it—though it might be obvious enough that the truth was far from being that.

There was one dear old fellow who had a variation on these forms: he was an alleged moonshiner, though, as he said, "Yes, I did make some whiskey, but I never sold none!" "How're you feeling, Joe?" I would say; and he would reply with his pathetic smile and his high soft voice, "Pretty well—pretty well, for 'n old man!" with a drawing emphasis on the "old."

He was about 70, with soft brown hair of youth, but bent and stiff and wrinkled with hard years and rheumatics, and if I questioned him more closely he would confess that he suffered from "lots o' misery here!"—passing his gnarled old hands over his digestive tract. Indeed four-fifths of the men had that trouble in more or less acute form, owing to the atrocious food supplied as our regular diet.

Joe's face, though lined with the hardships and privations of a long life, was beautifully formed, aristocratic in its delicate contours; and he possessed and constantly used one of the most delectable, contagious and genuine laughs that ever made music in my ears. The men would ransack their humorous resources in conversation with Joe merely for the sake of making him laugh. He would fix his old eyes squarely on yours and laugh and laugh with infinite mirth and good nature. Such a sound in such a place was rare and wonderful and helped one like fresh water in a desert.

The general friendliness among the men—so contrasted with their demeanor toward the officials—was due to the identity of their common interests; they were in the same boat, facing the same perils and disasters, united in the same aims and hopes, and leagued against the same oppressors. They lived in the constant dread of some calamity; and if I met the same man three or four times in the same day he would never fail to make the same inquiry, "How're you feeling?" recognizing that I might have received some ugly blow in the interval. There was a spontaneous courtesy and a charityableness in it that touched the heart.

The same sentiment was manifested at meals; if anybody got hold of anything that seemed to him a little better than usual he could not rest till he had offered some of it, or all of it, to his neighbors at table. "Here, take this—take it—I got more'n I want!" Or, watching his opportunity, Ned, the runner, who had comforted us on our first night in prison, would come to the door of my cell, with his Irish humor and cordiality shining in his eyes. "Say, Mr. Hawthorne, there's a dividend been declared!" and out of some surreptitious receptacle he would produce three or four crumpled cigarette papers—of all contraband articles in the prison the most prized. "No—take 'em—I got no end of 'em!"

A peculiar consideration was manifested by the men toward "the old man"; my hair was white enough, to be sure, but it had been so for nearly twenty years, and I was in much better physical condition than most of them. I accepted their kind offices with gratitude and emotion, and when I saw that to do otherwise would hurt their feelings, their concrete gifts, too.

But there were many instances of self-sacrifice greater than these; men would go to the hole sooner than betray a comrade; and you are fortunate in being unable to comprehend what that means. If a comrade in his range was sick and unable to come to meals, I have constantly seen a man secrete half of his miserable breakfast or dinner in his pocket, to be carried up to the invalid and smuggled into his cell. It was a matter of course; nobody remarked it. Any mistake or indiscretion committed by a prisoner would be instantly and almost mechanically covered by the man nearest him, although at the risk of punishment—and the punishment for betraying human sympathy in this way is of course it is generally severe; it is conspiracy to cheat the Government.

The traditional tale of a prisoner's devotion to animals is also true; a man next me at table—a yegg—for two weeks poured half his allowance of milk (he was on milk diet for acute indigestion) into a surreptitious bottle and bore it off for the sustenance of a couple of little forlorn kittens that he was acting as special providence for. The meditative smile with which he perpetrated this theft upon the prison authorities was a wonderful sight.

Another convict, a hardened old timer, for several weeks lavished carnes of tenderness upon a rat which he had laboriously conciliated and tamed. "What makes you so fond of that animal?" inquired one day a sentimental and statistical old lady visitor to the prison. After struggling with his emotions for a minute he burst out, "Yah! he bit the guard!" This dialogue was overheard and enchanted the whole penitentiary for months.

But one reflects that, whatever humane or lovable traits prisoners may exhibit, they are after all criminals! The existence in a lost soul of good qualities or impulses side by side with evil ones has long been recognized. Victor Hugo illustrated the discovery in his Jean Valjean, it was a staple with Dickens, Bret Harte's heroes are all of that type, it was the inspiration of much of Charles Reade's eloquence. Kipling has more than a touch of it, our contemporary fiction mangers sentimentalize over it and the train robber in the movies usually has a full line of sterling virtues up his sleeve.

The lost soul, in short, brims over upon occasion with the wine of regeneration. Therefore (so runs the moral) let us of the elect furnish up our charity, and be as tolerant toward this non-human class of people as may be consistent with our own safety and respectability. Scraps of our own lustrous impeccability have somehow found their way into them, and we cannot afford wholly to disavow them, in spite of their wretched lodgings.

This phariseism is so inveterate with us that I may fairly say that one has to be sentenced to jail as a criminal in order to correct it. From that vantage ground or mount of vision it presently

ing you are a Pharisee and a hypocrite and he is not; he stands confessed; your sin is still secret in your soul. By what right do you look down upon him?

These things which I now say to you I said first to myself, sitting in my cell or watching the endless gray blue files shuffle past me on their way to and from meals. It was of small help or significance that I claimed innocence of the particular offence that happened to be charged against me; I was as indistinguishable from these men in heart as I was in outward garb and rating. And I had manhood enough to feel glad that, since they had to be here, I was here

quite silent and impassive during the performance) who were willing to be saved to stand up in their places. All the stoolpigeons arose (poor devils!) and a few other bewildered persons who fancied it expedient to be on the side of the angels. "Thank you! thank you!" "Thank you!" hoarsely cried the exhorter, naively accepting their response as a personal compliment to himself.

But that great audience sat dark, silent and impassive, and it could only have been the tough hide of the old warhorse that made him immune to their cold contempt. I said to myself, "What a terrible audience it is! Who distinguished guests who sat behind him on the stage."

In prison, and only in prison, the veil is lifted or rent in twain and men are revealed as they are. As they stand before their Creator they stand now before their fellows. They are helpless—so warden and guards think—but they have gained a power beyond any physical might of man. They are voiceless, but they challenge mankind. They endure every indignity and outrage; but an account will be required of those responsible for it.

I wish to emphasize this dropping of the mask—this stop put to posturing Duration of confinement does not modify this attitude; the man of ten years says the same as the man of ten months, except—and the exception is worth noting—that the former's moral sense, whatever he originally had of it, has been blunted or discouraged, and he has conceived a settled animosity against human authority and disbelief in the justice and sincerity of its administrators. He has been the subject during his incarceration of such numberless acts of gratuitous tyranny, outrage and cruelty and has seen so much of "the way things go" in general that though he may concede that honesty is the best

policy he can find no other recommendation for it and is prone to the secret conviction that honesty itself is somehow only a cleverer way of cheating.

Such a state of mind is bred by prison experience—not otherwise. Prison obstructs or altogether closes every door to genuine moral reform in prisoners. A few larger souls overcome the obstructions; for example, our John Ross, who more than thirty-three years ago in the blindness of a drunken spree in Yokohama killed a shipmate who angered him. He died in jail last June. He was sentenced to death, but got commutation to life imprisonment.

He was a fine type of man, physically and mentally. His spirit was never broken by what he endured, and some years before being transferred to Atlanta he became, in a simple, non-sentimental, but profound way, religious. At Atlanta, in his cell, he was a centre of good influence on his fellow convicts; truthful, hearty, faithful, manly, cheerful; his preaching was by personal example, and by support and help given at need to the weak and despairing.

He was promised freedom on parole; the promise was not kept; but even this last betrayal failed to break his staunch heart. He died like a man, with composure and dignity.

With a few such exceptions prisoners are unrepentant except for business reasons—that is, either because they recognize that crime does not pay, or in order to influence in their favor the pardoning power. Many of them, of course, employ their prison opportunities to devise new crimes and to train fresh recruits from the younger convicts. Men who have been imprisoned

frankly, the skillfullest counterfeiter was worse than the worst reality. There is nothing in us to be proud of, but something to be thankful for. Society has done its worst to us; but it could not take away from us our mutual kindness, or the qualities that justify it. We are condemned as wicked, but we are comforted by one another's good.

Prison, in short, mends convicts more than any abstract argument demonstrates its own futility as a means of either taking revenge upon the prisoner or of inducing him to hate crime and to turn to good. Revenge of course is officially discredited nowadays, though it is practised as actively as ever under guises more or less civilized; but the pretence of moral reform by penal imprisonment is becoming too preposterous to be tolerated much longer.

On the contrary, prison renders the great aggregate of prisoners collectively self-conscious; the goats find themselves, and are forced into antagonism with the sheep not only as individuals but as a body. They make common cause together and in obscure ways achieve a degree of organization. They learn to regard the community not as better than themselves, but as more successful pensioners of fortune; they fear them because the advantage of numbers is on their side, but they hate them because they feel, either justly or unjustly, that they have suffered injustices at their hands, and they will resent upon them when opportunity serves not only from the original motive of physical need, but from the additional and more sinister one, bred in prison, of retaliation for the wrong done them.

When you sap a man's faith in plain justice and terrify him with the threat of irresistible power and torture him in mind and body through the exercise of that power you drive him to the support and society of men similarly circumstanced, and thus create the prison analogue in the body politic of a cancer in the individual body. Prison attempts to segregate this cancer, but only promotes its increase. Its poison is in the blood and circulates everywhere.

As I passed out of the dining room after meals each day I came to notice a young man who sat at a table near the door. He sat with folded arms and with a set and gloomy countenance. His eyes were fixed on vacancy, and he did not speak with his companions. A crutch leaned against his shoulder; he had lost one leg.

I learned his story. In the settlement of a small estate of which he was to inherit a sister of his had obtained money that belonged to him, and when asked to restore it to him had refused to do so. After some fruitless negotiation he got angry and sent her through the mails a message containing violent expressions of reproach and animosity.

The young woman took this paper to a United States marshal, who brought it to the attention of the District Attorney, with the result that the brother was indicted under some law of libel or of obscene matter, was arrested, tried and convicted, and sentenced to Atlanta penitentiary for five years. After he had been lodged in his cell his sister repented of her action and sought to have him freed; but the law does not recognize such changes of heart, and the brother must serve out his time.

We all know how easily family quarrels arise, how bitter they may be while they last, and how readily, withal, they may be accommodated by tactful handling. The sister had done wrong, the brother had lost his temper, in what family has not such an outbreak occurred? But because the brother had happened to put his bad temper on paper, the law, being badly involved, seizes him, takes five years out of his life and brands him with the shame of the jailbird.

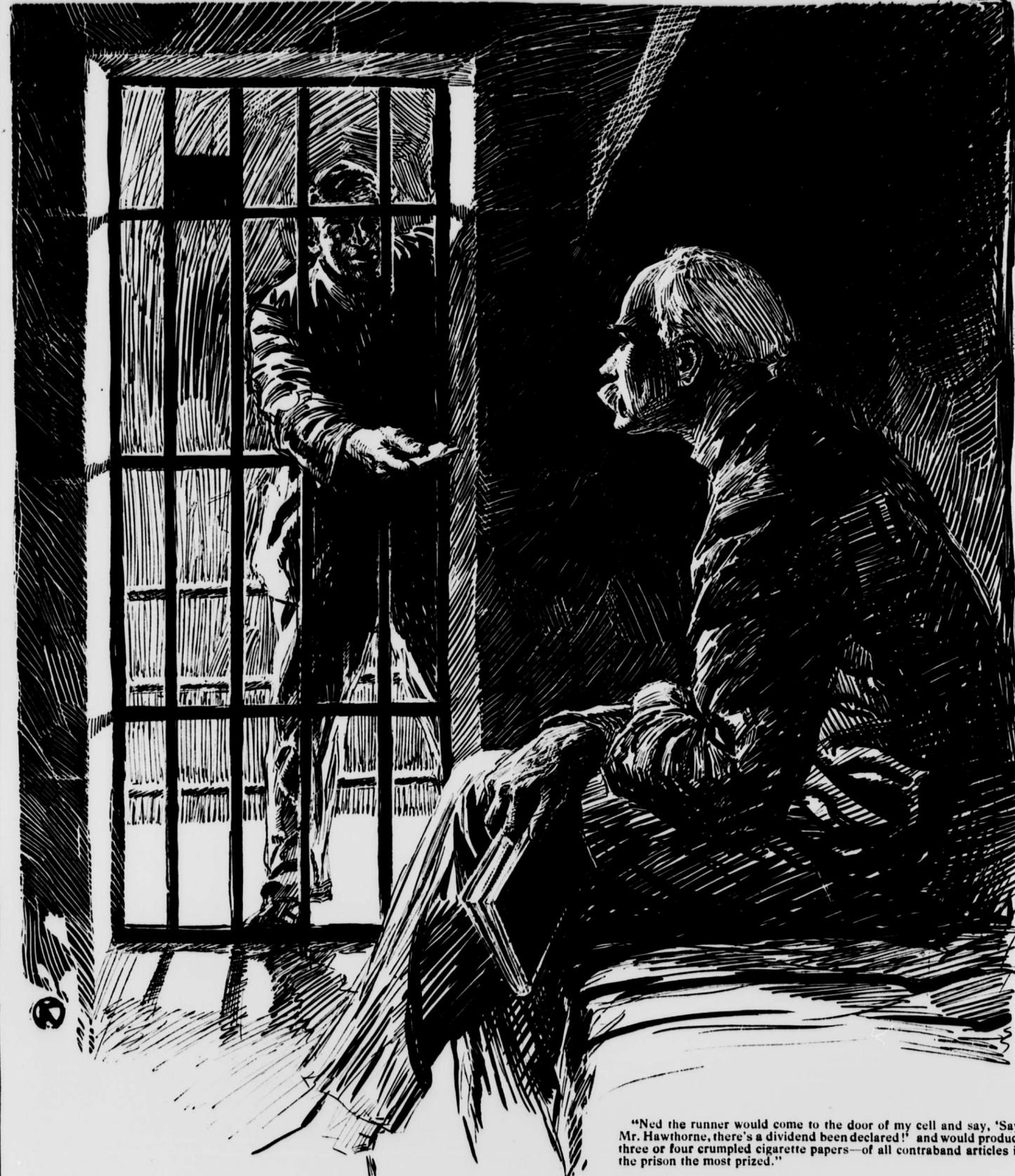
Upon what plea can such an act be construed as justice? But the District Attorney shows the court that the statute has been violated, the judge charges the jury, the jury finds its verdict in accordance with the law, evidence, and the thing is done. It is a mechanical process—nothing human about it.

Review your own life and discover whether you have ever stood in the shadow of a similar catastrophe. Was you ever angry with a relative or with any other person, and did you express your anger to him in words? Then you are as guilty as this one legged boy sitting there at his table with his crutch. Only, he happened to write his anger, and the sister happened to show it to a lawyer, and the machine was set in motion which no repentance or forgiveness or remorse can stop.

But the machine does not stop at the culprit's fault, and for such a fault the legal penalty may be five years in jail. You are not so remote from the subtleties of brotherhood as you may have supposed.

Will prison reform him? Is he so protected? Is faith in human nature promoted by such things? His case is but one of scores in every jail that are as bad and worse. But—show him to the lions—serves him right—is still the cry.

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REARRESTED.
By Julian Hawthorne.
Atlanta Penitentiary, July, 1913.

WITH joyful eyes the convict wakes—at last the day is come
To cast aside the prison yoke and take the trail for home!
Farewell steel bars and towered wall! Forgotten be the years
Of living death lived through, and all the evil, shame and tears!
Farewell the number and the stripe! The garb of honest men
Shall clothe him now; the hour is here to seek his home again!
There wife and friends and children wait with welcoming love, for he
Has paid his debt to Law and State—body and soul, he's free!

Yawns the dark gate and lets him pass; the fresh wind bathes his eyes,
Fair shines the sun on trees and grass, birds sing their melodies.
One step he makes, erect and free!—then, a detaining grasp
Falls on his arm; he turns to see—and gives a shuddering gasp!
Steel bracelets slip his thin wrists o'er, the Sheriff smiles; says he,
"This warrant calls for ten years more—so come along with me!
No nonsense, now! Stand up, you skate!" The gates reopen fast.
For him the cell and keepers wait—the convict's home at last!

CONTINUATION
The fourth instalment of "Behind Prison Bars," Julian Hawthorne's sensational expose of the treatment of prisoners and prison conditions, will be published in THE SUN next Sunday in an instalment called "The Men Above."