

DOES IT PAY TO PEACH ON YOURSELF?

Editor's Note.—The experience of Councilman William Burke of Philadelphia furnishes a striking example of the difficulty of a criminal getting back to the straight and narrow path. He was elected to the council on a "reform ticket." After a period of faithful public service and exemplary private life, he suddenly resigned his office last week and confessed to a long criminal career, including a seven years' term in the Massachusetts state prison. He was impoverished and driven to the revelation by pitiless blackmail on the part of a former convict, who threatened to expose him.

Do we really feel as we think we feel when we read the story of the greatest character of all fiction—Jean Valjean, the escaped convict in Victor Hugo's masterpiece, "Les Misérables?"

It is said of Laurence Sterne he shed tears over a dead ass, but was callous to the sufferings of a living mother. Are we a nation of Sternes who shed tears over the sorrows of an imaginary Jean Valjean, and send back to "hell," as he calls the outcast's life, a real Jean Valjean in the person of Alderman William Burke of Philadelphia?

Burke was born a gutter-snipe and knew neither father nor mother. He became a thief, as you or I probably would have done under the circumstances. Because of his natural ability—which would have made him a success in any other calling—he became what the underworld calls "a good thief." He was unvaryingly successful until he became a drug fiend, and then he was caught because, as he says, a dope fiend "hasn't nerve enough to steal unless he has the stuff in him, and then he has no brains."

He served seven years in state's prison. He broke himself of the drug habit. Would you or I have done that?

He thought out his life task and resolved to live a straight life when he got out. And he made good on his resolves. Would you or I have done that?

He saved a little money while working at his trade of wood finisher after he left prison with a suit of clothes and five dollars. Would you or I have done that?

He won the respect of his neighbors. He went into business and made some money. He married a respectable girl and has a child. He was a good speaker and helped to carry Philadelphia for the reform ticket which broke the hold of the old gang on that town.

And now he has sent in his resignation, with a full statement of the tragic facts of his life. He took it for granted that he would be execrated as soon as the people found out his secret. He intends