

# What 39 Reported

I.

Captain James Richmond was ushered into the room in silence, and the door closed after him. It was not the first time by a good many that he had crossed the threshold, but he had not before had any dealing with the present home secretary.

"Captain Richmond?" the secretary queried with a quick scrutiny of the face of his visitor, who returned the look as he inclined his head. "Sit down, sir. I am pleased to meet you. I understand that you were commissioned by my predecessor to inquire into the abuses in connection with the control of Blackenham prison, and that your inquiry was entirely successful. I believe— with a smile — "that you were sentenced to four years, and were liberated on a ticket-of-leave by order of my predecessor, after eight months' incarceration. Have you since reported yourself to the police, as you are bound to by the conditions of the ticket to do?"

"No," Captain Richmond replied, "I have not reported myself."

"Good," returned the secretary, "that will facilitate matters. I wish you, if you are at liberty, and not disinclined to return to prison life, to enter Shashnal prison, and see if you can get to the root of the mystery there. If you care to take up the matter, and are successful, you will not find this office ungrateful. When will you be ready for arrest?"

"The day after to-morrow, if that will suit."

"Very well. Be in Candos street between 3 and 4 o'clock on Wednesday morning, with a chisel and a few other burglar's tools in your pockets. Sergeant Crame will be there to arrest you, as before. I will arrange that you serve your sentence at Shashnal."

"How shall I communicate with you?"

"One of the visiting justices will make a point of seeing you privately whenever he visits Shashnal," the secretary replied. "You will say only as little as necessary to the justice; whatever you tell him I shall know the same day, so that you will be able to see me with very little delay. Have I made my wishes clear?"

"Perfectly so, sir."

"Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Nothing, unless you can expedite my arrival at Shashnal. I am itching to get there."

"You are interested, eh? Well, I cannot do much to expedite your sentence, but what can be done judiciously shall, I promise you. The preliminaries must, of course, be extremely annoying. I may add," the secretary said, holding out his hand, "if you carry this matter through successfully you may rely upon any influence I may have in the matter of a queen's messengership, for which I see your name has been down some considerable time."

"I'll get to the root of the matter," Captain Richmond muttered, as he walked toward the Strand, "if it has a root?"

"Thirty-nine! Do you call that the way to roll your bed?"

"What's the matter with it?"

"No back questions, please!" shouted the warden, "or, as sure as your name's 'Arris I'll dock your grub! Roll that bed, now, or— report! Next time, mind, report!"

He slammed the door to and went down the corridor.

Thirty-nine smiled blandly after him.

"When I get out of this and that man is dismissed—and I'll take good care he is—I'll waylay him and give him one of the soundest hidings he ever had. The question is, when shall I get out of here? Five days of the five years gone, and I don't see anything queer. Still there's a decent balance left for discoveries."

The cell door swung open and another warden looked in.

"Thirty-nine, talking! Won't do, my lad—won't do!"

"Saying my prayers," replied thirty-nine.

"Say 'em to yourself, my lad!" And the door slammed to again.

Early in the evening of the same day the head warden looked into cell thirty-nine.

"All right?" he inquired genially, as he looked thirty-nine carefully over.

"Yes, thank you," the convict responded with some surprise.

"Feel yourself as comfortable as at Blackenham? 'Orrid 'ole, Blackenham! Nearly as bad for the officers as for the prisoners. Was there four years myself."

Thirty-nine pricked up his ears nervously.

"My name's Williams," the warden continued with increasing affability. "Remember me? No? Well, p'raps not. Can't say I remember you. But we see so many new faces while you don't, so I thought you might remember me. Stop, though. Weren't you in for coming at Blackenham? 'Ousebreakin', eh? Well, well, every man to 'is trade. But I seemed to connect your face with a prisoner we 'ad for coinin' on a large scale—quite a small mint 'e'd been. Sure you never tried your 'and at coinin'? No? Well, well, it must 'ave been any fancy, then. Somebody something like you, I suppose. Night!"

"What did he come for?" Thirty-nine asked himself. "Clearly he had some definite object. I must cultivate my friend Williams."

But Williams did not show himself again for some days, and then adopted an entirely different manner.

II.

Thirty-nine had been in Shashnal prison about three weeks, when the justices paid their usual visit. He had not long to wait for his own call.

A tall, thin, lawyer-like man entered the cell, dismissed Williams with a gesture, and turned to the convict. He drew thirty-nine to the further end of the cell.

"I am directed by the home office to carry any communications you have to make," he said, in a whisper. "I have pen and paper, if you want to write. But be prompt."

Thirty-nine took the sheet of note paper and the fountain pen, and wrote a few hurried lines:

"I want a complete list of convictions against prisoners 73 and 24, now here; also any other facts bearing upon the nature of their crimes. Sooner, the better. Convey through chaplain, who is honest."

He dried the note on the slip of blotting paper between the leaves and handed it to the justice.

A moment later he was alone in his cell again.

"It sounds a wild notion, I must admit," he thought, "a very wild notion. Perhaps I am wrong. But it is queer that 24 and 73 are never at labor, and that they alone are never taken near the governor's house. There may be a dozen reasons for it, and it may have no possible connection with Williams' first visit to me, but there is something radically wrong and I see no other peg on which to hang my suspicion than the privileges of these two men and what Williams said to me. He has never given me or anyone in my hearing a civil word or look since."

Thirty-nine had to wait until the next visit from the justices for his answer from the home office, and in the meantime he had discovered little that supported his suspicions. But the letter the justice brought him gave him the utmost satisfaction.

It gave a list of convictions against the two prisoners whom thirty-nine had inquired about. Starting as a boy, with petty larceny, seventy-eight had turned to burglary, purse snatching, long-firm frauds and coinage.

Twenty-four, a younger man, was the son of the notorious "Jim Crow." His first conviction was for stealing lead-piping from an empty house. He was known to have assisted his father in extensive counterfeit-coinage schemes and, upon the death of "Jim Crow" inherited £2,000 or £3,000, with which he started himself as a bookmaker. He lost his money, and was mobbed for "welshing" at the Liverpool meeting in 18—. Next he was arrested for attempting to pass bad money in Nottingham, where a large quantity of base coin had been circulating for a period which corresponded with the length of time he had been in the town. Later he was sentenced to four years for passing base coins.

"Any message to take back? You had better not keep this paper," said the justice.

"No. Will you return it to the office? I will write a message back."

He took a pencil from his visitor, and wrote:

"Endeavor to trace movements of every coiner who has passed through here—movements since they left. Want my discharge, for time being."

Three days later a warden entered the cell of thirty-nine and threw down upon the pallet a bundle of clothes. They were those in which thirty-nine had entered the prison.

"You've got to change 'em" come to the governor's," he said.

Thirty-nine changed and followed the warden down the corridor, across the central hall, into the governor's office.

The governor sat at his table, and two men in ordinary clothes stood by.

"You're transferred to Portland, thirty-nine, under an order from the home office," said the governor. "These officers are here to fetch you. If you give me your word not to molest them or attempt to escape you shall not be handcuffed."

"I won't get up to any game, sir, and thank you," thirty-nine replied.

He was struck by the fact that his escort were in plain clothes. But it occurred to him that prisoners were not then conveyed from prison to prison in their convict dress, as had been the rule, and it was therefore only consistent that wardens should not be in their uniform, or the spirit of the reform would be lost.

His custodian ushered him into a fly that was waiting in the prison yard, and, as they took their seats facing him, the elder man smiled, and said quietly:

"I expect you can see through this, sir?"

"I think so," thirty-nine replied. "We shall take you to the station, if you've no objection, or the driver may smell a rat. There is a first-class to London, and two sovereigns I was instructed to hand you for your return expenses."

They alighted at the station and passed through the booking lobby.

"That is your train waiting, sir," said the second officer, "so we'll wish you a respectful good morning. We're not returning till a later train."

"Good morning," replied Captain

Richmond, as the train moved out of the station.

Arrived at the metropolitan terminus, ex-thirty-nine got into a hansom and drove away to his chambers. An hour later, attired in a smart morning suit, he was shaking hands with the home secretary.

"You were in a hurry to get out," the secretary said, with a deprecating smile. "I'm afraid you cannot have discovered much in the time."

"I don't think I could have learnt more had I remained," Richmond responded. "I have drawn some surprising conclusions, and the test must be made from outside. I have only to wait now for the reports concerning the movements of coiners who have passed through Shashnal."

"Here are the records of three cases. I can get others for you, if necessary. Why you pick upon coiners I don't understand."

"On the other hand, these records," Richmond returned, a slight color mounting to his face, "appear to confirm my suspicions. Does it not strike you as being strange, sir, that each of these men left the country almost immediately upon being released from Shashnal? I note one went to Australia, where he bought a small farm, which he has since successfully cultivated; another went to America, where he quickly ran through a sum of money which was considerable for a man of his position, and then turned his attention to forgery; the last went out to Durban, bought the good will of a small public house, and drank himself to death. In this taste for emigration, which seems to have been inculcated at Shashnal to one convicted for coinage, I seem to see a great deal to support my conclusions."

"Which are?" interrogated the secretary.

"That there is a secret mint at Shashnal."

"Preposterous!" the minister ejaculated. "A mint in one of her majesty's prisons? Dear, dear! You must think of something more likely—more possible!"

"Pardon me; but I cannot think of anything more possible to a man in the governor's position, who had the instincts of an enterprising criminal. He has every facility—immunity from raids, unlimited strong cells, which could readily be turned into workshops, a pretty regular succession of skilled coiners, whose assistance could be bought for leniency and a little money to start them on their release from prison, and whose secrecy could be absolutely relied upon."

"Looked at like that, it appears possible; but it is rather risky to base conclusions upon mere possibilities," the secretary replied, with quiet cynicism.

"I don't—at least, not entirely. Warden Williams attempted to discover whether I had done any coinage. He was remarkably genial until he learned that I had not, when he became surly almost to brutality. He was remarkably genial to seventy-eight and twenty-four, who were the only men in Shashnal who did any coinage. These two men were never in the labor yard. Why? They always looked pictures of health. Time after time I saw them enter or leave the entrance of the basement cells, at the side of the governor's house, which were condemned three years ago as unhealthy."

"Ah! we have something tangible in the use of the condemned basement cells," the secretary said thoughtfully. "That matter shall be inquired into at once. The best thing you can do is to send in your report, Captain Richmond, and then we can duly consider the matter."

He rose, blandly, and held out his hand.

Next day Captain Richmond received a check for his services. He tore it up in disgust, and then wished he had not. He was still debating in his mind whether he could ask for another check when he received an official document appointing him a queen's messenger.

For a time he was puzzled to know why he had been appointed. But he was not kept long in the dark, for he was called to the home office, where the secretary graciously apologized for having scouted the coinage theory. Two prison commissioners had visited Shashnal to inquire why the basement cells were being used. It was denied that such was the case. The commissioners demanded to look over the basement. No one knew where the keys were. Other obstacles were put in the commissioners' path, but everything was overruled and the basement opened by force.

"Discoveries were made which left no doubt that your conclusion was only too accurately drawn," said the secretary, hovering between confidence and reticence. "The governor resigned before the commissioners left, and the deputy-governor was appointed as a stop-gap. The same evening a raid was made upon a pawnbroker's shop in Mile End, kept by Warden Williams' brother, and between £400 and £500 of base coin was found there. Strange to say, the police have been interested in that shop for some time, owing to the frequent complaints of sailors, who largely frequent it, that bad money had been there foisted upon them. The business was an excellent medium for passing the coins. We are inquiring what other methods were also adopted. Considerable changes will be made at Shashnal, but it is undesirable that the matter should become public knowledge," the secretary concluded.

"The profits appear to have been very considerable, and the coins are really masterpieces of their kind."

## THE GLEAM OF GOLD.

### HUNTING THE PRECIOUS METAL IN AUSTRALIA.

Means by Which It Is Won—Countless Dead on the Track.

Australia is a land of gold, in a literal sense. In her mountains are mighty reefs of the precious metal, her rich flats are specked with it, and her mountain rivers wash it with them to the sea. Millions of money have been spent on it, and many thousands of tons have been won from her hidden treasure chambers, by what toil, by what bitter privation, by what dogged persistence and undying courage, only her swift flowing streams and her mountain gullies and spurs can tell.

It has been won by stratagem, by guile, or by robbery, even by personal violence and by bloody murder, by those who pegged out their lonely claims beyond the furthest reach of the law; it has been won by straightforward manly toil, by the sweat and pluck and endurance of hardy pioneers of fortune, and by the fevered stroke of brown-handed bread-winners, fighting for their families and their homes.

In the track of it are the countless dead, the men who have died hard, with their hands to the pick and the drill, in sight of the golden goal for which they have perilled and lost their lives; and those others, who, far as ever from their dim desire, have followed the gleam of it, hungry and footsore, but hopeful yet, to lie down in some lone gully, unburied and unknown, to mark by their white bones another milestone on the grim road to the latest rush.

#### NEARLY EVERY MONTH

in the gold districts comes the word of a rush to So-and-So, to the hill north of a Such-a-Place, or the gully west of Somebody's and off goes the district on its mad chase, to follow the gleam of the gold. Workingmen throw down their axes, farmers leave their plows in the half-turned furrows, men in good positions throw them up to follow the crowd, only, in most cases, to return in a week or a month and find—like Othello—their occupation gone. Claims are pegged out in feverish haste, in many cases of late-comers so far from the original find that they are quite valueless, even if the field turns out to be a good one.

In the central districts of New South Wales, from which good gold was taken thirty and forty years ago, the ground is turned up in huge mounds, showing where the human moles have toiled and toiled in the deep, dark shafts, sending up bucket after bucket of mullock, perhaps with no result, perhaps with a harvest of golden spoil.

In such places as these it is to be found the fossicker, as much a type by himself as is the sundowner; old and bent and grey, it may be, but with dim eyes not too dim to see the beckoning of the gleam of the gold; he spends the long summer days digging over the heaps of brown earth, or simply walking eyes cast down over the shallow holes which mark some surface rush, looking—alas! too often vainly—for the tiny speck which his trained eye so quickly discovers, or washing at some muddy pool a dish of earth, turning it this way and that, rolling it over and over, and peering closely at the last few grains to catch, if possible, the glint of "color" that is to tell him he is on the right road at last.

#### IT IS AN ALLURING GAME,

this chasing of the gleam, and to an old digger the only game worth playing; he may work for a while in the winter with a farmer on the plains, or with a splitter in the ranges, but with the first gold on the wattle-tree he is off with shovel and dish to the old diggings to try his luck again; sometimes he will make just enough to keep himself in "tucker" by selling the few grains he gets from time to time to the local storekeeper, who weighs it over for him and pays him the current price of the virgin gold.

Gold-mining in Australia nowadays has resolved itself more or less, like everything else, into a tireless struggle between the capitalists of the world; the great West Australian mines are flinging a challenge to time and a gauntlet to the grave.

But in the old days—the lawless, wild, wayward days—when a man pegged out his claim and defended it as best he could, taking his chance against every breed of man under the sun, and keeping his hard-won gold only by right of his manhood—then there was romance, and enough. Those were the days when the gold was brought up in the rough mining camps from the miners and sent down to Sydney and Bathurst by coach and escort; when the bush-rangers, well-informed of the day and the hour, reined their blood-horses—the one-time pride of some squatter's stable—in the shadow of timber-clump or rock, bailed up the drivers.

#### ON THE OPEN ROAD.

The writer has seen and passed on many occasions the bluff of rock on the Orange-Engowra road where the escort was stuck up by bush-rangers and the coach to Bathurst lightened of its weight of gold. The bush-rangers, arriving some hours before the coach was expected, stuck up two bullock drivers taking their waggons south for stores, and

compelled them to stand their team across the road, and thus block the highway, the rock bluff at the shoulder of the mountain preventing any detour. This done, they awaited the arrival of the coach. Soon after the appointed time the four in-hand dashed up, the driver slowing his team, as he saw the bullock waggons stopping the road. In stantly from their cover of rock the bush-rangers stood out and shot the leader dead, at the same time putting a bullet through the driver's hat. The escort, taken by surprise wheeled and fled, and the gold was handed over to the bush-rangers, an afterwards, so it is said, hidden by one of them on one of the rocky spurs of the Weddin Mountain, close to the scene of the robbery, where it is supposed to remain to this day.

But, if the romance is gone, the greed remains, and still the silk hatted financier and the rusty fop sicker follow the gleam of the gold.

### CAVE DWELLERS IN BRITAIN

#### Troglodytes Not Yet Extinct the United Kingdom.

Although there is nothing inherently improbable in the circumstance it is not generally known that the race of the troglodytes is not yet extinct, and that there are at the present time quite a number of cave dwellers in modern Britain. The inhabitants are by no means half-savages. At Kinver Edge, near Birmingham, are two rows of modern villa residences, formed mainly out of the "immemorial" caves hollowed out of the hill, with stone front projections. These dwellings are said to be "far more comfortable and luxurious than the less original residences to be found in more pretentious neighborhoods." The rooms are "spacious and rain proof," and the people of Enville, we read, "as the village formed by these houses is called, are justly proud of their quaint homes, and speak with patriotic affection of Holy Anstin Rock, the stone from which their dwellings are hewn."

There are several remarkable cave dwellings at Knarborough, in Yorkshire, the "proprietor" of one of which has adorned the various levels of his hillside cave home with battlements, and calls it Fort Montague. At Areley Kings, in Worcestershire; Seaton, near Exeter; Seaham, on the Durham coast; Stourton Castle, Castle Hill, Dudley, and elsewhere are other homes of modern troglodytes, and at Lodaig, near Oban, is a cave fitted up and for a long time used as a place of worship. The writer of this interesting article avers that "it is no exaggeration or perversion of the truth to say that there are many caves in the United Kingdom which are much better fitted for human habitation, and would be far healthier and roomier for a family (assuredly "roomier") than are some of the modern jerry-built erections that our crowded towns and villages are so familiar with at the beginning of the twentieth century."

#### JACK SHEPPARD'S HOUSE.

##### Recently Destroyed on Historical Thoroughfare.

Wych Street, a quaint old thoroughfare at the city end of the Strand, has now finally passed out of existence," says the London Daily Mail.

It was in the area of the Strand Holborn improvements, and its destruction had for some time been decided on. In a few months' time gigantic buildings of the most modern type will take the place of the quaint old houses, rich in historic memories, that made it one of the points of interest in London.

On Wednesday Jack Sheppard's house in this street was finally closed and handed over to the house-breakers. Jack Sheppard lived there when serving an apprenticeship as a carpenter. His name was carved by himself on a beam in the kitchen, where it remained until a few days ago. The beam is now being transferred to the Museum of London Antiquities and Curiosities being gathered by the London County Council.

Wych street had many other associations besides this. The Shakespeare Head, 31, at one time had its landlord Mark Lemon, the famous humorist, who in after years became editor of Punch. At the Globe Theatre many chapters of modern theatrical history occurred. The Globe is best known to modern theatre-goers as the scene of Mr. Penley's triumphs, and as the birthplace of Mr. Pinero's "Gay Lord Quex."

Almost opposite the Globe was the gigantic Olympic Theatre, a house noted for having perhaps more runs of bad luck than any other London theatre. Its great size and its unfortunate position gave it little chance. In recent years it was rarely occupied. Charles Dickens was associated with many revels around this street. A more tragic memory lies in the fact that Bishop Hooper was taken from the Angel Inn, then at the bottom, to his death at Gloucester.

Wych Street, a quaint old thoroughfare, of which it was a continuation. In old times the lane was known as the Via de Aldwych. Among other houses of amusement which in the past have centered there was Astley's Amphitheatre.

The Pope has 35 secretaries to answer his daily average of 23,000 letters.