

MY APPRENTICESHIP TO CRIME

An
(To the memory of my
Autobiography

Grace Maria Fredern.

-by-

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CHAPTER 2.Dr. Barnardo's Homes.

On the 26th February, 1896, aged nine, I was accepted into Dr. Barnardo's Homes as a waif and stray in need of care and protection. Enquiries were made at 37 Bacon Street, Brick Lane. When my parents were interviewed, they were found to be so poor, and too ill physically, to look after me and give me the care and protection I needed. They consented to me entering Dr. Barnardo's and becoming a Dr. Barnardo boy.

At this period, 1896, one of the glorious years of Queen Victoria's reign, the streets of London were visited nightly by Dr. Barnardo and some of his helpers, who were looking for some of the hundreds of young children of both sexes who were homeless, without parents, or any relatives who were willing to take care of these waifs and strays.

Dr. Barnardo and his helpers found these helpless waifs sleeping in empty houses, even on roofs of derelict buildings.

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After a few days, I was taken to Leopold House, Burdett Road, Limehouse, East London. After a few days I settled down to institutional life. Some benevolent destiny had rescued me from the streets for some good purpose.

Leopold House consisted of a number of buildings joined together to make a whole entirety. These buildings were entirely enclosed by a wall.

The parade ground was in the centre of the surrounding buildings.

Leopold House was run like a public school. The headmaster, Dr. Armitage, was a very fine Christian gentleman. He and his wife were in charge of the Home and they devoted all their loving care to the welfare of his charges, which the boys had never had before.

Dr. Armitage and his wife went to China as missionaries soon after I arrived at the home. There were some 400 boys of school age at the home. The staff consisted of twelve masters and matrons, also a number of instructors and many good helpers. There were fine large dormitories and splendid dining rooms, also a swimming bath where every boy was taught to swim. A good sized gym where we learned to do physical training drill and exercises.

Religious instructions and services were held in the chapel every morning, which were mostly non-sectarian but

non-conformist. to grow very rapidly and increase in weight.

We boys were dressed like all Barnardo boys in a blue serge trousers uniform with tunic seamed with a thin red stripe; boys the cap was like the cavalry pillbox with a red band round the cap bearing the words Dr. Barnardo's Homes in white letters. I was very proud of my uniform. Homes in large letters.

I remember the first night in the dormitory, a nice clean bed with real white sheets and warm blankets. This was the first real bed I can ever remember; the matron helped me into the bed and tucked the clothes in. So, after many small boys That first night I lay in that lovely bed thinking of my mother and family. Why was it that we were so poor and had no real beds, while others had real beds to sleep in? I wondered if my parents would ever provide a real home for my their family. on the top floor of a tenement. I would find my Soon after my arrival at the home I was taken seriously ill. I was removed to a London hospital. For some time I was on the danger list, but good medical attention and nursing pulled me through. Soon I regained my health and strength, and after a period of convalescence I left the London hospital and returned to the everyday routine of institutional life; during my term in the home was the happiest of my young life. physical Regular food, kindness and cleanliness were having a In beneficial effect on me to such an extent that, after a few

months, I began to grow very rapidly and increase in weight. My education, which had been sadly neglected, was now attended to. I learned very quickly. On Saturdays, the boys were allowed to leave the home on leave until 5 p.m. Here I must tell the story of why our boots were stamped with the words Dr. Barnardo's Homes in large letters. In Stepney, East London, and Commercial Road, the harpies who frequented these roads would lure small Barnardo's Boys down side streets, and rob them of their boots. Then they would pawn the boots for a few pence. So, after many small boys had been robbed of their boots, orders were given to stamp the boots so that the pawnbroker would know they had been stolen. Every Saturday I would go home to Bacon Street, where my family lived on the top floor of a tenement. I would find my sister Harriet nursing the new baby, while Mother was slaving at the matchboxes. After spending a few hours with them, it would be time to return to the home, which was about three miles away. Mother would always have a good cry; my sister would walk part of the way with me.

Life in Leopold House followed the pattern of most boarding schools; we attended classes in general education, physical training in the gym, religious instruction in the chapel. In the evening we were given instruction in the manual trades.

I was selected to become a member of the band, that is to say, I was learning the bagpipes. The home had a very good band which played the boys to Sunday services at Limehouse. Every Sunday morning, we marched to the Edinburgh Castle chapel for church service. We boys made a grand sight for the people in Limehouse and Burdett Road. The band played marching songs and the boys and masters marched along like the well-trained boys they were. What happy days.

All the boys were eager to go out into the world to play their part, most of them were destined for Canada and Australia, some went to sea in the Royal Navy, others into the Mercantile Marine.

Soon I was issued with my band uniform of kilts, sporran and even an ornamental dirk. I was very proud to have been selected as a member of the band.

Of all those 400 boys who were in Leopold House with me, I am certain I was the only failure, but this I can say, that all through the bitter years that were before me, of suffering and despair, the training and influence of the home eventually triumphed and I regained my self-respect.

27th November, 1896. Ten years old.

On this date, I had been in the home some nine months. I was now ten years.

1897. This was the year of the Diamond Jubilee. Queen

Victoria had reigned some sixty years. The British Empire had been created by Britons in every part of the world. Victoria was Empress of the greatest and mightiest Empire of the modern world, yet in the richest city in the world, the centre of the Empire, with riches pouring into the country from the four corners of the earth, half of the people lived and starved in hovels not fit for human beings. During the Diamond Jubilee celebrations, Victoria Park was used as a large camp for Indian troops, of whom many thousands were brought to London to take part in military parades and reviews.

So while the celebrations were taking place to mark the Queen's Jubilee, we boys would watch from the windows of the dormitories and see the Indian troops marching to and fro from their camp in Victoria Park. Their gorgeous uniforms, their splendid horses and their Oriental faces, made such an impression of splendour and majesty that I have never forgotten, although it was some seventy years ago.

All over London, the Jubilee celebrations were carried on everywhere with great fun and games, everybody seeming to join in the festivities. We of my generation can look back on these times and reflect on the glories that were once Britain's.

One of the saddest occasions was when we were gathered together in the chapel to say Godspeed to the boys who were

leaving for Canada or Australia. The whole congregation would sing Hymn 99 in the old hymn book: "God be with us till we meet again." Many of us would openly grieve for our friends who were leaving us forever.

The time would come when it would be my turn to leave England, and my parents and family, for the far-off lands of the Colonies, where we would be welcomed with open arms and where we would grow up into worthy Colonials, and be a credit to Dr. Barnardo and his aides.

For years we had sent thousands of convicts to the lands across the seas, until the settlers had protested violently against this pollution of their settlements. That was Government policy, which was condemned by all decent minded men.

27th November, 1897. Eleven years old.

I had been in the home 21 months and it would soon be my turn to leave England.

1898. In January of this year, I was selected for migration to Canada. I had to undergo special training to fit me for life in Canada.

- 1) The candidates for migration had to be physically sound;
- 2) Must be honest, trustworthy and industrious, without criminal or vicious taint;
- 3) Had to be mentally alert and fit;
- 4) They must have received the rudiments of a plain

English education, the boys trained in some industrial pursuits.

The proof that I fulfilled all the requirements is that I was nominated for migration. I was fitted with overseas kit and I was due to sail for Canada in the autumn of 1898.

The prospect of going to Canada in the autumn of 1898 was very exciting and filled me with enthusiasm. I would be twelve years old in November and considered myself quite old enough to leave my family.

During this period, having been in the home for two years, I had learned to take part in many exhibitions of physical training and other forms of gymnastics. I took part in performances before the Prince of Wales, who afterwards became Edward VII, in the Earl's Court Exhibition during the year 1898.

On one occasion, I took part on a Saturday collecting money for Dr. Barnardo's Homes. We had a large stand in Leadenhall Street, City, and the city people were very generous with their half-crowns.

My future seemed rosy. My dreams were of the vast prairies or Canada, the gold mines or Klondike, which had caused a great rush to the Yukon.

Spring came and soon we were in the summer, only a few more weeks and autumn would be here, and I would be leaving London, my family, my dear Mother, and the slums of the East

End forever. I would be one of the many thousands who had left England to enlarge the frontiers of the vast British Empire, upon which the sun never sets. If I left England today is a great country because of the fine lads and lassies that the great Dr. Barnardo trained and equipped for the task of making Canada great. Ice took me from the haven of 10 On the 11th July, 1898, I went to visit my parents at their home in Bacon Street, E. My mother told me that my father had decided to keep me at home, I was not to go back to Leopold House. It appeared that they had been sent documents to sign, giving their consent to allow me to emigrate to Canada. My parents, being my legal guardians, had the legal right to stop me leaving England, so they refused to let me return to Leopold House. I might add that as I was the only one who could write the letter telling the headmaster at the home why I was not returning to the home, this task fell to me. We young children in Victorian times had a greater fear and sense of obedience to our parents than exists today, 1969. education, knew only the animal desires in my clothes and boots were taken back to the home, with a letter explaining the case. All this was a great disappointment to me. But the explanation of their refusing to allow me to return to the home and migrate to Canada was easily understood. I was nearly twelve years old, intelligent

and physically fit, able to earn money.

But the more important factor was the £60 compensation awarded to me for my accident by the Court. If I left England, my parents would never be able to lay their hands on that money. That £60 was a small fortune to them. So Destiny and my parents' avarice took me from the haven of love and safety to cast me back into the perilous waters of the East End streets. It must be remembered that the husbands and fathers of the working classes were tyrants to their women folk. They treated them like slaves; they had to be obedient at all times to the wishes of their husbands. The idea of equality between husband and wife never entered his head. Those who have read Oliver Twist will know Dickens' description of the relationship between Bill Sykes and Nancy. So, understanding the lordship of the man over his woman, I realise now why my mother was so obedient at the time to my father's wishes. My father, like the working men of his generation, lacking education, knew only the animal desires in fulfillment of which he treated women with brutal callousness. He was father to six other children besides the four born to my mother, so the fact that he took me away from Leopold House, so that I could earn money to keep him, was in keeping

with his whole outlook on life.

There was no room for me to sleep in the one room we called home, but I was a boy of nearly twelve years. I was confident I could look after myself. So my parents had their way and I went back to the life of the slums. The problem of where I was to sleep was solved by enlarging my eldest sister's sleeping accommodation, which was on the floor.

Let it be clearly understood, we were a family of six. Mother and Father shared the only bedstead. There was no false modesty, no curtains to hide the bed and its occupants. We were back in the Stone Age, when the family shared a cave. We were two boys and two girls. My eldest sister, fifteen years, myself, twelve years, my young sister nine years, and the baby three.

We all slept on the floor, on an old straw mattress. We were not ashamed of the conditions of our life, because the same conditions were shared by thousands of other families. We had been born to these conditions and we accepted them as the normal life of the people.

The people who formed the governing class, whether they were Whigs or Tories, were the people who should be ashamed by the conditions which existed in the land they had the privilege of governing wisely, for the improvement of the under-privileged.

great They called these dark ages "Sixty Glorious Years".
 the r In considering the events that prevented me emigrating to
 Canada, I have often wondered why the law thought it necessary
 to give the parents the legal right to stop their children
 emigrating, if it could be proved it was for the good of the
 child. Why should drunken and dissolute parents, who have
 no means of giving their children the education and care they
 need, why should they have the powers to prevent the children
 from enjoying the chance to lead a better life? once and a
 career Dr. Barnardo had been engaged in a lawsuit over the
 question of sending a boy to Canada without obtaining permission
 from the guardians of the boy. Some Catholic connections
 objected to the boy, who had Catholic association, being
 sent out to Canada without their knowledge. The Judge
 had decided that the boys' parent or guardian could prevent
 any boy from being sent to Canada, no matter whether that
 parent or guardian was a person so vicious and evil that they
 were not fit persons to have the child in their care.

My parents, having vetoed my chance of becoming something
 better than an East End loafer, the law had given them that
 power and I was the victim who had to suffer for it in the end.

The Assistant Commissioner of Police, Sir Robert Anderson,
 speaking of this decision of the Judge's, said: "Surely the
 conscience of the nation cannot slumber much longer over this

great question? We nowadays are too enlightened to recognise the right divine or kings to govern wrongly, but the divine right or vicious and brutal parents to make their children brutal and vicious is still guarded with scrupulous care.

CHAPTER 3.
Boyhood in Victorian London
I can picture some such victim of the law standing in the dock at the Old Bailey convicted of serious crime. I can hear him saying words like these. 'Yes, I am a criminal but at whose door is the real guilt of my crime? I am just what the State has made me. I was innocent and happy once and a career of usefulness was open to me, but your infamous laws stepped in and dragged me back to the want, misery and vice from which kind friends had rescued me.'

In the words of the Assistant Commissioner of Police, "I am what the State made me."

27th November, 1898. Twelve years old. and a job at Lipton's tea warehouse and offices in City Road, Hoxton, N.E., from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. with afternoon break. The pay for this job was 7/6d. weekly. This money was a great help to Mother; she was sure of the rent.

The back room on the landing was rented by a family whose sons were doomed to die early in life. They were an Irish family; the father was a cripple who earned a living as a shoe-black. The mother, a hard working woman fond of a drink in the pub next door. They had three sons and one daughter.