

Chapter 56

My governess offered to find friends that should get his recognisances off of the file, as they call it, and that he should not suffer; but it was not possible to convince him that could be done, or that he could be safe any way in the world but by appearing against me; so I was to have three witnesses of fact against me, the master and his two maids; that is to say, I was as certain to be cast for my life as I was certain that I was alive, and I had nothing to do but to think of dying, and prepare for it. I had but a sad foundation to build upon, as I said before, for all my repentance appeared to me to be only the effect of my fear of death, not a sincere regret for the wicked life that I had lived, and which had brought this misery upon me, for the offending my Creator, who was now suddenly to be my judge.

I lived many days here under the utmost horror of soul; I had death, as it were, in view, and thought of nothing night and day, but of gibbets and halters, evil spirits and devils; it is not to be expressed by words how I was harassed, between the dreadful apprehensions of death and the terror of my conscience reproaching me with my past horrible life.

The ordinary Of Newgate came to me, and talked a little in his way, but all his divinity ran upon confessing my crime, as he called it (though he knew not what I was in for), making a full discovery, and the like, without which he told me God would never forgive me; and he said so little to the purpose, that I had no manner of consolation from him; and then to observe the poor

creature preaching confession and repentance to me in the morning, and find him drunk with brandy and spirits by noon, this had something in it so shocking, that I began to nauseate the man more than his work, and his work too by degrees, for the sake of the man; so that I desired him to trouble me no more.

I know not how it was, but by the indefatigable application of my diligent governess I had no bill preferred against me the first sessions, I mean to the grand jury, at Guildhall; so I had another month or five weeks before me, and without doubt this ought to have been accepted by me, as so much time given me for reflection upon what was past, and preparation for what was to come; or, in a word, I ought to have esteemed it as a space given me for repentance, and have employed it as such, but it was not in me. I was sorry (as before) for being in Newgate, but had very few signs of repentance about me.

On the contrary, like the waters in the cavities and hollows

of mountains, which petrify and turn into stone whatever they are suffered to drop on, so the continual conversing with such a crew of hell-hounds as I was, had the same common operation upon me as upon other people. I degenerated into stone; I turned first stupid and senseless, then brutish and thoughtless, and at last raving mad as any of them were; and, in short, I became as naturally pleased and easy with the place, as if indeed I had been

born there.

It is scarce possible to imagine that our natures should be capable of so much degeneracy, as to make that pleasant and agreeable that in itself is the most complete misery. Here was a circumstance that I think it is scarce possible to mention a worse: I was as exquisitely miserable as, speaking of common cases, it was possible for any one to be that had life and health, and money to help them, as I had.

I had weight of guilt upon me enough to sink any creature who had the least power of reflection left, and had any sense upon them of the happiness of this life, of the misery of another; then I had at first remorse indeed, but no repentance; I had now neither remorse nor repentance. I had a crime charged on me, the punishment of which was death by our law; the proof so evident, that there was no room for me so much as to plead not guilty. I had the name of an old offender, so that I had nothing to expect but death in a few weeks' time, neither had I myself any thoughts of escaping; and yet a certain strange lethargy of soul possessed me. I had no trouble, no apprehensions, no sorrow about me, the first surprise was gone; I was, I may well say, I know not how; my senses, my reason, nay, my conscience, were all asleep; my course of life for forty years had been a horrid complication of wickedness, whoredom, adultery, incest, lying, theft; and, in a word, everything but murder and treason had been my practice from the age of eighteen, or thereabouts, to three-score; and now I was engulfed in

the misery of punishment, and had an infamous death just at the door, and yet I had no sense of my condition, no thought of heaven or hell at least, that went any farther than a bare flying touch, like the stitch or pain that gives a hint and goes off. I neither had a heart to ask God's mercy, nor indeed to think of it. And in this, I think, I have given a brief description of the completest misery on earth.

All my terrifying thoughts were past, the horrors of the place were become familiar, and I felt no more uneasiness at the noise and clamours of the prison, than they did who made that noise; in a word, I was become a mere Newgate-bird, as wicked and as outrageous as any of them; nay, I scarce retained the habit and custom of good breeding and manners, which all along till now ran through my conversation; so thorough a degeneracy had possessed me, that I was no more the same thing that I had been, than if I had never been otherwise than what I was now.

In the middle of this hardened part of my life I had another sudden surprise, which called me back a little to that thing called sorrow, which indeed I began to be past the sense of before. They told me one night that there was brought into the prison late the night before three highwaymen, who had committed robbery somewhere on the road to Windsor, Hounslow Heath, I think it was, and were pursued to Uxbridge by the country, and were taken there after a gallant resistance, in which I know not how many of the country people were wounded, and some killed.

It is not to be wondered that we prisoners were all desirous enough to see these brave, topping gentlemen, that were talked up to be such as their fellows had not been known, and especially because it was said they would in the morning be removed into the press-yard, having given money to the head master of the prison, to be allowed the liberty of that better part of the prison. So we that were women placed ourselves in the way, that we would be sure to see them; but nothing could express the amazement and surprise I was in, when the very first man that came out I knew to be my Lancashire husband, the same who lived so well at Dunstable, and the same who I afterwards saw at Brickhill, when I was married to my last husband, as has been related.

I was struck dumb at the sight, and knew neither what to say nor what to do; he did not know me, and that was all the present relief I had. I quitted my company, and retired as much as that dreadful place suffers anybody to retire, and I cried vehemently for a great while. 'Dreadful creature that I am,' said I, 'how may poor people have I made miserable? How many desperate wretches have I sent to the devil?' He had told me at Chester he was ruined by that match, and that his fortunes were made desperate on my account; for that thinking I had been a fortune, he was run into debt more than he was able to pay, and that he knew not what course to take; that he would go into the army and carry a musket, or buy a horse and take a tour, as he called it; and though I never told him that I was a fortune, and so did not

actually deceive him myself, yet I did encourage the having it thought that I was so, and by that means I was the occasion originally of his mischief.

The surprise of the thing only struck deeper into my thoughts, and gave me stronger reflections than all that had befallen me before. I grieved day and night for him, and the more for that they told me he was the captain of the gang, and that he had committed so many robberies, that Hind, or Whitney, or the Golden Farmer were fools to him; that he would surely be hanged if there were no more men left in the country he was born in; and that there would abundance of people come in against him.

I was overwhelmed with grief for him; my own case gave me no disturbance compared to this, and I loaded myself with reproaches on his account. I bewailed his misfortunes, and the ruin he was now come to, at such a rate, that I relished nothing now as I did before, and the first reflections I made upon the horrid, detestable life I had lived began to return upon me, and as these things returned, my abhorrence of the place I was in, and of the way of living in it, returned also; in a word, I was perfectly changed, and become another body.

While I was under these influences of sorrow for him, came notice to me that the next sessions approaching there would be a bill preferred to the grand jury against me, and that I should be certainly tried for my life at the Old Bailey. My temper was touched before, the hardened, wretched boldness of

spirit which I had acquired abated, and conscious in the prison, guilt began to flow in upon my mind. In short, I began to think, and to think is one real advance from hell to heaven. All that hellish, hardened state and temper of soul, which I have said so much of before, is but a deprivation of thought; he that is restored to his power of thinking, is restored to himself.

As soon as I began, I say, to think, the first think that occurred to me broke out thus: 'Lord! what will become of me? I shall certainly die! I shall be cast, to be sure, and there is nothing

beyond that but death! I have no friends; what shall I do? I shall be certainly cast! Lord, have mercy upon me! What will become of me?' This was a sad thought, you will say, to be the first, after so long a time, that had started into my soul of that kind, and yet even this was nothing but fright at what was to come; there was not a word of sincere repentance in it all. However, I was indeed dreadfully dejected, and disconsolate to the last degree; and as I had no friend in the world to communicate my distressed thoughts to, it lay so heavy upon me, that it threw me into fits and swoonings several times a day. I sent for my old governess, and she, give her her due, acted the part of a true friend. She left no stone unturned to prevent the grand jury finding the bill. She sought out one or two of the jurymen, talked with them, and endeavoured to possess them with favourable dispositions, on account that nothing was taken away, and no house broken, etc.; but all would not do, they were over-ruled by the rest; the two wenches swore home to the fact,

and the jury found the bill against me for robbery and house-breaking, that is, for felony and burglary.