

## The Lighter Side of Prison Life

By LONG SENTENCE.

### THE GAOL CHAPLAIN

II.

One of the most interesting personages ever connected with Mt. Eden prison was a former chaplain—the Rev. J. S. Hill—who died some years later at Lagos as Bishop of Western Equatorial Africa. No doubt he will still be remembered by many New Zealanders.

Mr Hill's sympathies went out to everyone in distress, and in the case of prisoners, especially to men who had long sentences or special causes of trouble. He inspired confidence by talking about himself—his affairs, his aims, and what he was doing. Here is one instance. On one of his visiting days, I remarked: "We thought last Sunday you did not look well, Mr Hill." "No," he said; "I was very much worried. My house would not sell. I wanted money, and did not know where to turn for it. But there are noble, generous fellows in the world. Some one heard I had been disappointed, sent for me, asked what was the matter, and then wrote out a cheque for £100." (I think it was the late Mr. J. L. Wilson.)

The first time I saw the Rev. Hill we prisoners were all assembled awaiting his arrival. There was a whisper: "It's the little parson; it's all right!" His appearance was a guarantee the service would be interesting. His presence always sent a warm thrill through the congregation. His methods of getting hold of them were sometimes unique, but always effective. Once he began with: "Which do you think came first—the egg or the hen, or the hen or the egg; the scorn or the oak, or the oak or the scorn? A great many people have tried to solve this question. You have leisure

time on your hands when in your cells, try what you can do." On another occasion he appeared with a very black eye. He began: "I have a black eye. I have more than once seen members of this congregation with black eyes. Were I to tell you I got it chopping wood, you would not believe me, and you would not be far wrong." There was so much care and thought displayed in his sermons that I asked him once: "How many different sermons he preached on a Sunday?" He laughingly replied: "I preach one only. You fellows get it first at 9.30—fresh with the froth on it. At 11 it is delivered at Remuera; at 3 it is preached somewhere else; finally—very flat—it is given at night in the Choral Hall."

Mr Hill occasionally took discharged prisoners to his house, and put them up until either they left Auckland or obtained employment. He was not, however, easily fooled. Among others was a man named Notwill—son of a Dean—who had been in trouble of some kind in the Old Country. It was his boast that he always selected high ecclesiastical dignitaries to operate on. Hitherto he had drawn the line at Bishops; but now found the limitations of the colony would compel him to include Archdeacons. (At this time he had just completed a sentence for operating on a Bishop to whom he had brought a letter of introduction.) Shortly after Notwill's release, one of the prisoners asked after him. Mr Hill said: "He's a scoundrel. I took him to my house, and went security for him for £25, and what do you think? He has done this, and done that, and now I've had to pay £12

to get him out of the country to save my £25." He was very much excited. Striking the table, he said: "I feel inclined to swear I'll never help any of you fellows again." Then he quietened down, and continued: "Ah, well, that would not be fair; some deserving one might fall again through want of a helping hand. But it's awfully riling."

At the services the men were usually very well behaved; but at a Sunday afternoon service long ago, I remember a row with some amusing features in it. The parties were two men whom we will call Black and Jeenjah. The former, half a fool, was very irritating, and at length Jeenjah struck him, knocking him off the seat. The only warder present was an old soldier and an Irishman. He locked both men up; but to Jeenjah, who was very shrewd, and had, when cornered, a habit of putting warders in an awkward position before magistrates, he said: "Jeenjah, me man, I did not see just right what that feller did to ye. I know you'll spake the truth, and not dease me." When brought before the magistrates the warder said: "I bring these two men before ye, sors, for fighting in Church. Jeenjah, a well-conducted, orderly man, was sitting quietly in his seat, listnning to the discourse, when, wid-out a word of a lie, sor, I saw Black there wid-out any provocation, strike him on the head and knock him out off the form. Black is a troublesome sort of a man, sor, an' I thought he mint mischievous, so I kept my eye on him." Jeenjah, on being asked what he had to say, replied "the officer had put the case so fair and so much better than he could—he would say nothing." Black, of course, was greatly excited, and talked himself into a knot, but it ended in him getting three days' bread and water. To Jeenjah afterwards the warder said: "That teler got just what he deserved: it's us that knows how to dale wid coves like that."

Occasionally the prisoners would take a dislike to the preacher. "You may take a horse to the water, but you can't make him drink," so you may take prisoners to church, but you can't make them join in the responses. That is what happened on many occasions. Reasons for dislike were various. One old gentleman

who had something to do with shirts was reported to be sweating his girl employees; another was said to lend money at extortionate rates of interest, and to have sold somebody up—out of house and home. The oddest case, perhaps, was of a gentleman who rubbed future punishment in hot and strong; but the chief cause of his offending was always opening the service with: "Reud your hearts and not your garments." Tearing clothes is a stiff prison offence, and this remark was interpreted that prisoners might break their hearts, but they must not tear their clothes.

One Sunday afternoon a lay preacher explained the absence of some jewellery he usually wore by solemnly declaring that an angel had appeared to him in his garden, and told him it was not in accordance with his spiritual mission as a preacher to wear anything of the kind. He had, therefore, gone back to pearl buttons and a "Waterbury" watch. Following this up a prisoner wrote to the late Bishop Cowie (who always took a great interest in the prison) stating he had always under-tood miracles were things of the past, and inquiring if there was authentic evidence that such visitations as the visitor described had taken place in modern times. History does not record his Lordship's reply; but at different times he deemed it advisable that gentlemen whose methods of conducting the services were not appreciated should discontinue them.

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