

# A Convict's Story of "Hell" Half Acre"

### An Armistice Day Story of a War Veteran Who Came Back to Virginia.

Like many a poor, misguided devil I came back from Chateau Thierry in 1918 believing that colored people would get justice and decent treatment in the South, and the good will that all patriotic and law-abiding citizens expect from a democratic government.

I was a fool to believe this; Portsmouth was the same narrow, prejudiced little town that I left back in 1914. Oh yes, the boys got a big hand when they landed. The mayor and the city band turned out to greet us and there were bells and all the rest of it. But it wasn't long before everybody got down to the serious business of looking for a job; and there weren't many to be found either. Anything would do, anything to stave off hunger and misery and despair that began to creep over us after being home a year. And we were fighting to make the world safe for democracy. Democracy, hell!

By dint of hard work, plenty of guts, and a small inheritance from my grandmother who died while I was fighting in the Argonne, I managed to make a fair profit on the chicken farm I started out in Sel-

borne on the outskirts of town. It was a blustery November evening and I gave the little Ford truck more gas as we jugged along toward town. The car took those red clay hills like a gaiting gun. I was proud of that little truck; it was last year's model, but it had this year's power. I had been able to save time, money, and energy with that car.

Maybe next year I would turn it in. I wasn't sure. There really wasn't anything the matter with it. The little old engine purred like a tabby cat, as we neared Portsmouth. The sky looked gloriously red and a few feamy flakes of clouds sped along gathering up their skirts as the November breeze made them scurry along.

"Say, you big black buzzard, where the hell do you think you're going?"

I nearly steered the car into the ditch. I hadn't heard a soul on the road and didn't know there was a cop within miles of me.

I pulled up short and listened. "It's darkies like you that makes it hard for all you coons. Ain't you heard of no law in Virginia?"

"But officer—"

"No lip outta you or I'll crown you one. Come on wid me."

Refusing to let me drive my car into town—I had just a mile to go—he ordered me into his car and drove into town, leaving my car to be brought in later.

Neither said a word during the short trip to town. I knew what this would mean. It wouldn't be any question of a light fine; it would mean thirty days in the dark and evil-looking towers of the old city jail at County and Water Streets. They called it "Hell's Half Acre."

How often had I run past there on my way to granny's house over on Lark Street. I recalled that I once told her a wild tale about a man leaning over the turret of that building with a knife in his mouth.

The reputation of this jail was no worse than the stench that seeped out from the cracks in the dark and dank walls surrounding its court-yard.

Gramp had told me of the case of Bilbo Grimes. It seems he had been accused of rape on a white girl. Despite the fact that there was no evidence, he was dragged from his house and thrown into jail. They hadn't waited to get

the evidence; they had him tied to one of the iron cross pieces in the cell and left him hanging with his feet just barely touching the floor. He finally confessed from sheer pain and exhaustion. Then they beat him with thongs and left him to die slowly from the effects of rat bite.

I had heard tales of other prisoners brought there in a diseased condition and left to die for lack of medical attention. It gave me the creeps to think about it.

The car pulled up in front of the ponderous iron gates. In a moment they swung back with a piercing squeaking sound on their rusty hinges, and we passed into the outer court of the jail.

We marched into the dimly lighted chamber of the police justice. I took one look at him and knew that to plead for a lawyer, or to try to get in touch with friends would only make my position worse.

In the light of the arc lamp his pudgy face took on a greenish hue. He had small blood-shot eyes that looked out from pockets of flesh. They were the eyes of the fanatic, the Negro hater. The fact was he had been remanded to the county asylums once or twice because of signs of insanity, yet he was allowed by the citizens of Portsmouth to dispense justice.

After a few perfunctory remarks from the policeman with me, he looked down at me with a heavy scowl and shouted, "Thirty days on the chain gang!"

Thirty days of wearing stripes, unloading cars, digging ditches for drainage, and clearing the putrid and rotten filth from city sewers. And Duberry and Smith, the white guards, ready to lash out at one for imaginary infractions or slow movement. I had heard their favorite sport was to draw the blood from black backs.

My sentence began. All day we worked on the gang, and at five o'clock we were herded back to jail. The lock step started, the guards took their positions and we marched through the town to the jail. We were being shunted back to those dark filthy stinking holes where as many as fourteen men were packed into the space intended for five.

Monday morning—dark clouds overhead and ominous sounds coming from the jail. The din of tin cups and plates being banged against tables was heard. The incessant roar and screaming of angry and sick men; guards running here and there shouting; mutiny was in the air.

Early Glover, a trusty at the jail, on his way to mail letters, as was the custom, was turned up by a stool to the jailer, Charlie Crain. Crain took the letter, which was addressed to the governor. Glover was sent to the prison hospital, his head split from the blow dealt by Crain. Via the grapevine route the prisoners heard about it and were up in arms. It was the straw that broke the camel's back. The fight was on.

Late that night order had not been restored. The men refused to eat. In raucous tones they demanded better food, better treatment, work for both white and colored alike, and they were holding out, too.

Two days of this and wind got to the governor's ears. The papers played it up. The governor at the urgent request of the Portsmouth Bi-racial Committee, took a hand. Whites had to work too! The chain gang system was abolished. In the investigation that followed, Hell's Half Acre was cleaned from top to bottom. It was a banner day for the town.

## WAKE UP YOUR LIVER BILE— WITHOUT CALOMEL

And You'll Jump Out of Bed in the Morning Rin' to Go

If you feel sour and sunk and the world looks punk, don't swallow a lot of salts, mineral water, oil, laxative candy or chewing gum and expect them to make you suddenly sweet and buoyant and full of sunshine.

For they can't do it. They only move the bowels and a mere movement doesn't get at the cause. The reason for your down-and-out feeling is your liver. It should pour out two pounds of liquid bile into your bowels daily.

If this bile is not flowing freely, your food doesn't digest. It just decays in the bowels. Gas bloats up your stomach. You have a thick, bad taste and your breath is bad, skin often breaks out in blemishes. Your head aches and you feel down and out. Your whole system is poisoned.

It takes these good, old CARTER'S LITTLE LIVER PILLS to get these two pounds of bile flowing freely and make you feel "up and up." They contain wonderful, harmless, gentle vegetable extracts, amazing when it comes to restoring the bile flow freely.

But don't take liver pills. Ask for Carter's Little Liver Pills. Look for the name Carter's Little Liver Pills on the red label. Beware a substitute. See at all stores. © 1931 C. M. Co.

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Why sit around at home wishing you were popular? Doll yourself up, make your hair beautiful and you'll be popular again.

If hot irons or hair straighteners have made your hair turn red, gray or streaked, now you can make any hair a beautiful lustrous black again. Just use the famous LARIEUSE French Hair Coloring. Apply the one liquid and in 15 minutes your hair will be the most beautiful, soft, fluffy jet black you have ever seen.

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IF YOU FEEL FINE IT'S ALWAYS AN EASY THING TO

## Be Happy

AND MAKE YOURSELF POPULAR WITH PEOPLE

Laugh and the world laughs with you. Complain all the time and you sit by yourself. Nobody has time to feel sorry for a woman who is always ailing. Why do it? Stop this bad habit!

**Be Strong and Healthy**

Women who are strong and healthy, FEEL young all the time. They have the energy to do things and they get a real thrill out of life. YOU can be just that kind of a woman.

For more than half a century St. Joseph's G.F.P. has provided abundant strength and energy to weak, ailing, run-down women. This marvelous tonic contains roots and herbs which are regarded as extremely beneficial to woman-kind. That's why St. Joseph's G.F.P. is known as "old reliable" to thousands of its faithful users. Treat yourself to health by asking your druggist for the big dollar bottle of St. Joseph's G.F.P. It's sold on a money-back guarantee.

## Daily Menu

**MORNING**

- Spiced Apple Sauce
- French Fried Bread
- Bacon Strips
- Coffee
- Maple Sirup
- Milk

**NOON**

- Baked Tomatoes Stuffed with Creamed Ham
- Chiffonade Salad
- Baking Powder Biscuits
- Strawberry Jam
- Tea

**NIGHT**

- Stuffed Meat Rolls
- Sweet Potato Croquettes
- Creamed Eggplant
- Lettuce Salad
- Thousand Island Dressing
- Raspberry Jam Tarts
- Coffee

## Bright Sayings of the Children

### What Do Yours Say?

Send them to us, and they will be published

Little Jimmie came home from rural school one afternoon crying. When questioned by his mother as to what he was crying for, he replied that he was afraid of the cows. "Why, Jimmie," said his mother, "when I went to school, I used to pass those cows every day and I was never afraid."

"Yes, mother," said Jimmie, "but when you went to school those cows were calves in the barn." A. R.

On asking my 6-year-old daughter what she did during the school recess she nonchalantly replied, "O, we play school." R. W. S.

My daughter, aged 6, was to have a holiday on Thursday afternoon and Friday due to a teachers' convention. She was telling her daddy about it and said: "O, daddy, do you know we get a hollow afternoon on Thursday and a hollow day the day before Saturday?" E. F. B.

## WHAT TO WEAR

### Sport Clothes for Cold Days Win Approval — Blankety Materials Come in Bright Colors.

Shivering shoppers will be glad to hear about the new blankety looking sports clothes that are a find for chilly weather any hour of the day, whether you are a sports enthusiast or not. There's nothing warmer looking than these new ideas, and if thickness and wooliness keep you cozy these are the clothes for you. The fabric is something new — a smooth surface that looks exactly like a warm blanket, to be practical and properly descriptive.

The colors are as heated as the thickness of the material — deep old gold, maroon, green and brown. But the way you anchor these swanky new clothes around your slowly congealing blood stream is something to cheer about. Huge hingelike clips are all you use, three or more on the jackets and coats in most models, glittering gold and copper clips that are positively blinding to the interested spectator, but are the smartest keeps you together that have yet arrived to shock a busy world.

One street ensemble tailored with a swanky Savile-row manner consists of three pieces. A short, separate skirt (modestly eschewing any of the aforementioned clips), a skirt that fits warmly and flares slightly around the lower edge with a lot of fashionable gores.

A military short packet that is double breasted top and skirt to make a knockout suit for general wear.

The third piece of this trio is the long wrap around long coat. This coat costume is perfect as far as the general tailored description is concerned but the color combination will leave you gasping with suspense until it belongs to you.

Another swagger affair is the same sort of blankety stuff in a good bright green wool, but this time it is just a skirt and jacket duet with shining brass buttons that march up the front of the chest in double formation. Again you can have a grand time collecting suitable blouses or sweaters with dizzy striped effects to wear with the windbreaker ensemble.

If you crave furs and plenty of fur to keep you warm, look for the bold, blustering woollens in checked patterns that almost scream for attention, the wildest checks and plaids are the smartest, especially when they are combined with sports furs such as lapin and silver muskrat.

For the shopper who doesn't fancy checks and plaids there are some heartening colors that ought to more than satisfy — a od brilliant shade of copper, burnt orange, mahogany and sizzling blues and greens that certainly do great things to such hitherto neglected silver muskrat pelts.

Clever designers have thoughtfully provided all kinds of cold weather clothes this year, the good looking things that keep you wrapped warm and thickly, but keep you slim and swanky with all kinds of fashionable personality.

A small child who is learning to eat with a fork, may be allowed a piece of bread or roll to use as a "pusher." This practice is discontinued, however, as soon as the child acquires ease and neatness at the table.

## THE HUMAN THING TO DO

Oysters or clams which are served in soup are broken in half with the spoon.

When creamed chicken or fish is served in patty shells, the pastry shell should be eaten with the fork, along with the creamed food.

If you refuse to dance with one gentleman, do not accept another's invitation at once. To do so would be very bad form.



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