Against the Law

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me that at Sing-Sing he had been allowed to have his own typewriter, on which he wrote short stories which he was permitted to sell to magazines; at Wormwood Scrubs one was not even allowed to have a fountain-pen sent in, and the rules about taking out written work on discharge were ludicrously obscure. Bill, my companion on the button-hole machine, had spent a few weeks in the prison of La Santé in Paris, where, he told me, work was commissioned by outside firms who paid good wages, out of which the prisoners were able to buy a wide choice of food and drink. The Lithuanian tailor told us that in Communist gaols the prisoners were permitted a monthly parcel, containing food and cigarettes, and that it was possible to earn remission by extra work.

This was a system which had already been suggested, rather surprisingly, by Dan. His idea was that in certain cases a convicted man should be sentenced, not to so many years' imprisonment, but to a stated amount of work: a thousand mailbags, or ten thousand pairs of socks, or preferably something which could be sold outside the prison. In this way, the men would be given a real incentive to hard work; the prisons would eventually become less crowded; and the money earned by the prisoners could be used for their rehabilitation, both directly and indirectly. Each man would have a small nest-egg to take out with him, and deductions could be made each week to help with the salaries of instructors and the provision of lecture-rooms and workshops. Furthermore, a man who had caused a financial loss to someone by his crime would have an opportunity of paying it off, at least in part, by his own efforts.

The wastage of earning-power in Wormwood Scrubs seemed to be almost deliberate. Men who already possessed some useful training were very seldom given a job in which they could practise it. There was no shortage of plumbers, builders and cooks, but they were not to be found in the Works party or in the cookhouse. Some of the allocations were so eccentric that they could only be ascribed to a macabre sense of humour on the part of someone in

authority. A horrible creature who had pleaded insanity when charged with raping his own children was given the job of looking after prisoners who went to see the psychiatrist. A soldier, found guilty of mutilating an African suspect in Kenya, was put to work in the operating theatre. An ex-Guards officer, much publicised during his trial as a friend of the Royal Family, was put in charge of the sink where the sample bottles of urine were washed. A man who had killed two girls by administering an aphrodisiac to them was immediately given a 'Red Band' and seconded to the hospital.

An establishment run on such lines was obviously not going to fit anybody for a better life. We did what we could to help each other, but it was not much. Jerzy, the little Pole, used to give Dan tailoring lessons every evening, but after a few months he was sent away to another prison. Dan then applied for permission to take a correspondence course. Every conceivable obstacle was put in his way. One of the warders, nominally in charge of education, told him: 'This is a very expensive course, too expensive to waste on anybody like you.' Dan pointed out that if he was forced to go back to housebreaking and received a further sentence, he would cost the country a great deal more than the fees for the course. He took his request to a higher level, and after a long delay was told that the time he still had to do was too short to allow him to complete the course. He then began all over again, with a request for a shorter course. I never heard the end of the story, because I was released before he had had any reply.

Two things kept me going. One was the visit, every three weeks, of Lord Pakenham, who was preparing a report for the Nuffield Foundation on the Causes of Crime. He must have exhausted my views on this subject during the first few visits, but he kept on coming for as long as he was able. Sitting with him there in a room without a warder, in the dingy grey suit which I had worn for six months, with my hands scarred by the mailbag needle and my fingernails black with ingrained dirt, I could feel that I was still a

person. I can never repay him for what he did for me during those months.

The other thing that armed me against the world of prison was the feeling which the warder at Winchester had expressed so long ago: 'There's always someone worse off than you.' I found it impossible to pity myself when I was surrounded by so much tragedy and degradation. I looked at the old man who sat opposite me at meals; he was 72, and had been sentenced to seven years' imprisonment for his first offence. While he was on bail, he had had an accident and had been blinded in one eye. He was unable to read, so he just sat staring at the wall. He had a calm and beautiful face, deeply lined with age. He said to me: 'I am quite content. When you are as old as I am, you might as well be here as anywhere else.'

He was not the oldest. There was a man of 82, who was so crippled with rheumatism that when he arrived the other prisoners had to undress him and put his uniform on him. I do not know what his crime had been, but he was, in effect, sentenced to death. He died after a few weeks, in the prison hospital. The man who had poisoned two girls helped to lay him out.

I talked to a boy of 22 who had been sentenced to death for murder, and had spent three months in the condemned cell while his case was considered by the Lords. He told me how they had taken away his shoelaces and the buttons off his coat, and watched him day and night in case he killed himself. There were three things he remembered about the cell: the crucifix over the bed, the door that led to the execution room, and the grating through which he was allowed to speak to his mother.

I met a man who had been flogged at Dartmoor: the worst thing, he said, was the way the 'cat' curled round you and bit into the right side of your chest. I met wicked men and foolish men, and cowards and men whose courage made me feel ashamed, and from each of them I gained a particle of strength, or tolerance, or compassion. I saw much to make me angry, but much, too, that made me glad to be a member of the human race. I felt, almost for the

first time, that I was a part of these people, that we were all involved in each others' happiness, and sorrows, and meannesses and sudden, unaccountable bursts of joy. When someone was released we all shared a little of his freedom; when somebody killed himself, we all shared a portion of his death. I learned for the first time the meaning of those great, ringing words which I had known since childhood: 'No man is an island, entire of himself . . . therefore send not to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.' I saw that my whole life had been a longing to be part of the world, with all its squalor and its laughter and its tears.

It was impossible for me to know what my future would be. The *Daily Mail* had dismissed me when I was convicted, and I did not know whether I would be able to get another job in Fleet Street. From the sparse quota of letters and visits which I was allowed to receive, I gathered that I still had many friends, and that many people whom I had not known before had expressed their willingness to help me. In November, when Edward Montagu was released from Wakefield, I heard that he had been welcomed back by almost everybody, but I could hardly believe that this would happen in my own case. I remembered that I had admitted, in the witness-box, that I was a homosexual. It had seemed to be the right thing to do at the time, but I began to wonder now what effect it would have upon my future. Although I had reacted strongly against it at the time, I was haunted by the suggestion of the Governor at Winchester that I would have to go abroad, change my name, and behave like a furtive outcast for the rest of my life.

Winter came, bringing with it leaking roofs and a flurry of snow on the exercise yard. We began to look forward to Christmas. There was a man in 'D' Hall who made paper flowers; he sat on the floor of his cell night after night, crimping and twisting crepe-paper carnations and roses and chrysanthemums. Others made garlands and chains from tissue paper and glue, and painted signs in fancy lettering wishing us a Merry Christmas. The food-ration

became noticeably more meagre, and the men who had been in prison for more than a year explained that the cooks were beginning to save up for an outsize Christmas dinner.

On the pay-day before Christmas we were given a bonus, according to the length of time which we had done. I received an extra 1s. 6d. with which I bought a packet of Woodbines. We were all rich and reckless, and gave each other presents. The old man Ted, who had stolen the perambulator, redoubled his efforts at scrounging in the Tailors' Shop. On Christmas Eve we concocted an enormous gift stocking inscribed with his name, containing a weird assortment of 'roll-ups', sweets, matches, a clean shirt and a pair of socks. There were 'joke' presents in it, too; some of the cigarettes contained horsehair or feathers, trouser-buttons were substituted for wine-gums, and a bottle labelled Vaseline Hair Tonic was filled with water. We prevailed upon the Principal Officer to present the stocking to Ted, who fell on it savagely, his eyes watering with anticipation. He smoked the horsehair cigarettes without any apparent discomfort, and sold the 'hair tonic' for a quarter of an ounce of tobacco to a friend, who, as he said later, 'bloody near killed him' when he discovered the deception. Ted, however, had the last laugh, because he had already smoked the tobacco by this time.

Bill and I festooned our button-hole machines with a strip of rag on which we had chalked: 'A Merry Yuletide to all our Customers.' We also put out a Christmas Box, hoping that someone would be hysterical enough to put something in it, but all we collected was a packet of cigarette-papers which turned out to have been cut out of a toilet-roll and five Woodbines. These were given to us by a young soldier who had gone berserk in the Canal Zone and received seven years for shooting his sergeant; we knew he could not really afford this rich gift, so we bought an equivalent quantity of Nut Milk chocolate and gave it to him.

I received twenty-five Christmas cards from a diverse assortment of friends, including a former charlady, two Peers, a correspondent on *The Times*, a farmer, a Harley Street surgeon and a barmaid. With these, I decorated my cell.

The ground floor of the Hall, where we ate our meals, was a fantastic sight. There were artificial flowers everywhere, and on Christmas Day the tables were covered with old sheets, which gave them a most luxurious air. Paper-chains were festooned from wall to wall, and those over our table had been augmented by Dan, who had contrived some striking garlands by an ingenious manipulation of torn-up toilet-rolls, glue and red ink. He had been very shocked on the previous Christmas, apparently, to discover that the decorations in 'D' Hall consisted mainly of pieces of the *News of the World*, stained green.

Christmas dinner was quite unlike any other meal of the year. The helpings were enormous, the food queasily rich in comparison with the normal diet, and, as a final gastronomic touch, we were each given a mug of sugared tea. Major Grew stood around beaming, and I felt that we were supposed to burst into 'For He's a Jolly Good Fellow'. Resisting this temptation, we ate as much as we could and rolled the rest up in our handkerchiefs, so that we could eat it in peace in our cells during the next few days. We all felt rather ill next morning, and were not really surprised to hear that one prisoner, no doubt overcome by the gruesome bonhomie of it all, had hanged himself during the night.

I had always told myself that Christmas was the last milestone on the road, and that once it was over I would begin, as the prisoners used to say, to pack. Actually, the last ten weeks of my sentence were by far the worst. The reason for this was purely physical. Although the workshop was steam-heated almost to the point of suffocation, the cells were devoid of any heating at all. There was a small grating in each cell which was supposed to be connected to a circulating system of warm air, but nothing whatever came out of it. It was freely admitted by all the prison officials that the heating arrangements had been out of action for years, but nobody did anything to put them right. The prison Commissioners, apparently, had adopted their usual attitude of pious hand-wringing and pleaded poverty. Neither Major Grew nor Dr Landers ever visited the cells, and the warders were muffled up in military greatcoats and

gloves. The prisoners, still wearing the clothes in which they had sweltered during the summer, had to keep warm as best they could.

I used to sleep in my underwear, shirt and trousers, with the rest of my clothes piled on my bed in a heap which was loosely held together by tucked-in mailbags. In spite of this, I developed chilblains which made my fingers swell up and crack like beef sausages too rapidly fried. Several prisoners told me that they had been to see the Prison Doctor with this complaint, but had received no treatment. The best cure, I was told by one of the burglars, was to soak a piece of rag in urine and wrap it round the affected part. He added that I might not fancy the idea, but it worked. I tried it, and it did.

In January I was transferred, for meals and Association, to a building known to the authorities as the Old Recreation Hut, and to us as the Old Rec. The wind whistled round and through this ancient hovel with a shrill persistence, reducing us all to a shivering huddle of creatures who would not have been out of place at Belsen. We hunched over the lukewarm waterpipes, blowing on our hands and trying to cover our knees with the thin grey capes provided for outdoor wear. There were no lavatories in the Old Rec, and anyone who wanted to relieve himself had to ask the warder on duty to let him out. When perhaps a dozen had applied, the warder would unlock the door and the men, watched by a ' Leader ', would scuttle out into the exercise yard to squat on latrines whose plumbing-systems had long since frozen up, and whose seats were often an inch deep in snow.

The Old Rec will always be, for me, a vision of Hell. The wireless loudspeakers, roaring out distorted dance music, made conversation impossible. The lights were dim and unshaded. The smell of sour food and sweaty feet hung over everything like a fog, and everywhere one looked one saw men sitting there, hunched in their capes, their eyes blank, waiting, waiting.

In January, too, the New System began. As we understood it, the theory was that Wormwood Scrubs was gradually to be transformed into something on the lines of

Wakefield: a place where men like Dan, who by this time had been in prison for 30 months, would at last have the opportunity of acquiring that ' training for freedom ' so glibly advertised by the Prison Commissioners. Mr Cockayne, asking us for our co-operation, told us that the scheme would prove entirely to our advantage in the end. We were all moved to different cells several times, so that ' D ' Hall presented the appearance of a demented game of General Post. In the re-shuffle, I contrived to spend four nights in a cell in which the heating actually worked. It was rather like a Turkish bath, but dirtier, because all the hot air which should have been distributed between the 88 cells on the landing was diverted into this one, bringing with it large amounts of brick-dust and soot.

When I left Wormwood Scrubs in March the other prisoners were still waiting to discover the advantages of the new system. The only results, up to then, were that we worked for an extra two hours a day at the same rate of pay, and that our exercise time was cut down from the statutory hour to a bare twenty minutes. There was no sign of any of the privileges to which the long-sentence men would have become entitled if there had been room for them at Wakefield: no vocational training, no freedom of Association, no home leave during the last months of their time.

There were only 28 days in February, but they seemed like 28 years. Someone had sent me a calendar for Christmas, and every night I pencilled out the date.

The Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society asked me whether I needed any assistance on my release.

The Chaplain looked at my notebooks to see whether I had written in them anything obscene or prejudicial to prison discipline.

Jimmy said: ' Try to do something for us when you get out, Pete; we can't do nothing for ourselves.'

It was my last day.

The exercise yard looked just the same. The two crooked businessmen were still walking around with rapid strides, booming at each other. ' You see the one on the left? ' asked Basil. ' Well, he's selling a Rolls-Bentley he hasn't got

to the one on the right for £2,000 that *he* hasn't got either.'

'How many more hours?' the burglars inquired.

A warder to whom I had never spoken before shook my hand and said: 'I hope very sincerely that all goes well with you from now on.'

I said good-bye to Dan Starling.

That night I lay on my hard mattress for the last time and tried to gather together all the jig-saw pieces of experience and understanding which I had collected, so that I could take them out with me in the morning. I marshalled, re-arranged and sorted them in turn, trying to fit them together in a way that had value and meaning for me, if for no-one else.

In prison I had known hatred, laughter, pity and love. I had learned to know more about my fellow-men than I had ever done before, and I believed that this knowledge would help me to know myself.

I considered the man whose name was written on the card outside the door: 2737, Wildeblood, due for release to-morrow morning, and wondered what kind of person he was. In my imagination, the cell became filled with shadowy figures in wigs and robes. I could hear a rich, sneering voice:

'Ladies and Gentlemen of the Jury, it is the submission of the prosecution—and a submission which, however, regrettable, you may feel obliged to accept—that the accused Peter Wildeblood is a man who, during the last twelve calendar months, has consistently shown by his actions and his demeanour that he is in no way capable of profiting by the lesson which Society, in its wisdom, has seen fit to visit upon him.

'I will not take up your time, members of the Jury, by dwelling upon the sordid and deplorable catalogue of his activities. I will merely remind you that he has failed, totally failed, to take advantage of the unique opportunities for the reconstruction of his life and his outlook which exist, as we all know, in Her Majesty's Prisons.

'This man has shown no jot or tittle of remorse, members of the Jury. He has maintained an attitude throughout

which you may think is less appropriate to a convicted criminal than to a prisoner of war. An even more revolting feature of his behaviour, in the submission of the Crown, is—and you must forgive me for speaking frankly, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Jury, but we must not flinch from our duty in these matters—an even more revolting feature is the fact that, during his time in prison, he has persistently associated with persons who are infinitely his social inferiors. In the circumstances there is only one verdict which you can give, and I hope you will give it after long scrutiny and careful consideration. That verdict is: Guilty.'

There was a rustle of silk. The jury, who were sitting uncomfortably crammed together on my wash-stand, rose to their feet like puppets on a string. 'Don't the jury wish to retire?' asked the judge.

'Good gracious, no!'

'It's disgusting!'

'There's no smoke without fire!'

'I read it in the paper!' A big blob of spit ran down the windscreen.

'Order, order!' screamed the judge, putting his ear trumpet to his lips and blowing a shrill blast. 'Are you agreed upon your verdict?'

'Of course we are. Guilty. With a strong recommendation to no mercy.'

'Good. I mean yes. Prisoner at the bar, did you hear what they said? Have you anything to say before the sentence of the court is passed upon you?'

But I was not listening. They were only voices, and they could never hurt me any more. I was as detached as a passenger in an aeroplane.

'Wakey-wakey!' shouted a warder through the spyhole. 'It's come at last!'

It was Tuesday, March the eighth. In an hour I should be free. I washed, shaved, collected my belongings and tore up my calendar. The other prisoners' cells had not yet been unlocked. I walked past the closed doors, thinking of the men who lay behind them. I handed in my blankets, my sheets, my pillow-slip, my brushes, my plate and my drink-

ing-mug, and my book of rules for the guidance of Convicted Prisoners, Male. I took off the prison clothes and put on my own. I made up a bundle of letters and books to take with me. Two other men were being released that morning; a wizened, red-haired taxi-driver, and a young man in a handpainted tie and gumboots. We sat in the Reception block drinking tea and eating porridge. It was part of the prison lore that a man who left his plate of porridge would return some day to finish it.

At ten minutes to eight the gate was opened. The early shift of warders were coming on duty. Many of them had been my friends, and I shook hands with half a dozen of them. Then I walked out through the gate.

I had never really believed that this would be the end, or even the beginning of a new chapter. It was merely a part of the story which had been implicit in me from the day when I was born; as much a part as the knock on the door when I was arrested, or the moment when, as a child, I realised that I was different from the rest. I could not stop the pages from turning, or close the book. I had chosen to be myself, and I must go on to the end; there must be no abdication, no regret. The world knew what I was, and would make its judgments accordingly, but I could make no concessions to its opinion. 'Simply the thing I am,' I told myself, 'shall make me live.' In a world of hypocrites, I would at least be honest.

For the first few days, I thought that people were looking at me; then I realised that I was flattering myself. I had forgotten that free men and women looked at each other in this way, just as I had forgotten that trees had a clean, green smell and that Virginia cigarettes tasted of damp hay. I wondered what it would be like to come out of prison after a five-year sentence. Even to me, the world was strange and a little frightening; the traffic roared and pounced, the colours of women's dresses, flowers and neon signs jabbed the nerves of my eyes, and music had a new, rich texture as tangible as fur or silk. I woke at dawn, and began to long for bed at dinner-time. When I saw my first egg, I was stricken with awe at the impregnable perfection of its shape,

so that I hardly dared to crack it with my spoon. When I saw my first daffodil, I felt like weeping.

My friends said: 'In a few weeks you will have forgotten it all. It will fade from your mind like a bad dream. It's over and done with now, and nobody wants to remember it.' They meant to be kind, but I knew that they were wrong. I could never forget. I would always carry with me, like a hidden scar, the memory of what I had seen. From now on, perhaps, I could never be wholly happy; but at the same time I could never be wholly selfish or consumed with pity for myself, because wherever I went I should be haunted by the faces, savage or resigned or drained of hope, of those hundreds of men so much less fortunate than myself. Society might have succeeded in forgetting them, but I never could. I knew what it was like to be a criminal, to know that everything you did would be misunderstood or used as evidence against you, so that you just drifted, hopelessly, from one prison sentence to the next. I knew something of the bitter rage which wells up in a man's mind during the long cold nights, when he thinks of the punishment which Society, with icy impartiality, is exacting from his wife and children. I knew the dreadful isolation of the prisoner, meticulously deprived of every contact with the world into which, one day, he will be released. I knew how it felt to be a member of a minority, under-privileged even in gaol because of the shape of one's nose or the colour of one's skin.

But, for the time being, my main concern was with the problem of my own future. The classic pattern, which I was determined not to follow, was that of Oscar Wilde: the flight abroad, the assumption of a new name, the eventual death in sterile obscurity. Such a course may have been inevitable for Wilde, but it seemed to me a betrayal of everything in which I believed; it would, moreover, award the final victory to those who had tried so hard to destroy me.

While I was in prison I had written to the Home Secretary, asking for permission to give evidence to the Committee on Homosexual Offences. This permission was granted, but the Committee decided to wait until my release before

calling me as a witness, so that I might give my views more freely. I had volunteered to do this because I thought there were probably very few other men who were able or willing to put forward the viewpoint of an admitted homosexual. Most of the evidence, I imagined, would be of a theoretical nature, given by psychiatrists, clergymen and lawyers whose only experience of the problem was of the 'exposed ninth'—the untypical percentage of cases in which mental illness or legal proceedings were involved.

I discovered, however, that I was by no means alone. A number of men holding positions of trust and responsibility, against whose names there had never been a breath of scandal, had offered to give evidence—if necessary, in public. This seemed to me an act of high courage. It was easy for me to speak for the homosexuals, because my admission that I was one of them had received the most widespread publicity; I had nothing further to lose. These others were risking everything to do what they believed to be right. They knew that, once they had appeared before the Committee, their names would be known to the police; and, if no change was made in the law, that their lives would be made intolerable. They had no illusions on this point. They realised that a decision by the Committee to leave the law as it was would be followed, immediately, by a savage and merciless 'purge' of all known homosexuals, in which they would be the first to suffer.

I am not suggesting that the police would be so childish as to indulge in an orgy of revenge. The explanation is much more straightforward than that. In Wormwood Scrubs I had had the opportunity of talking to a number of policemen who had been convicted of various offences, and they all told me the same story. Promotion in the Police Force, they said, depended very largely on the number of convictions secured. In each police station there is, apparently, a kind of scoreboard on which the convictions obtained by each officer are recorded. It is the number which counts, not the gravity of the offences concerned; and, as one of the ex-detectives at Wormwood Scrubs remarked to me, it is very much easier to arrest a homosexual

than a burglar. A policeman whose score is lagging behind that of his colleagues can always catch up by going to the nearest public lavatory, or merely by smiling at someone in the street. By various promises, the arrested man can usually be persuaded to plead guilty; if he does not, his word is unlikely to be taken against that of a police officer. Mr. E. R. Guest, the magistrate at West London, was reported recently as saying that his court alone dealt with 600 such cases every year. This grotesque mis-statement was much quoted as a sign of the decadence of the age and the prevalence of homosexuality; Mr. Guest's subsequent explanation that he had in fact said sixty cases a year went almost unnoticed. There is little doubt, however, that prosecutions for homosexual acts are on the increase, and for a very good reason. As one man said to me in prison: 'Why should they climb a tree to catch a burglar, when they can pick up people of our sort like apples off the ground?'

Whatever the decisions of the Committee may be, they will still have to be accepted or rejected, in the end, by the opinion of ordinary men and women. It is not a question which is usually discussed, and it may therefore be rather difficult to obtain a fair sample of public opinion. The question, in its simplest form, is: Should the law be amended so that the acts of consenting adults, in private, are no longer regarded as a crime?

I believe that it should, but my opinion is naturally coloured by the fact that I am one of those whose lives would be made easier by such a change. This, however, is not the only consideration on which I base my view. I am thinking of the thousands of others who, even if they never come into direct conflict with the law, are condemned to a life of concealment and fear. Fear is a terrible emotion; it is like a black frost which blights and stunts all the other qualities of a man. If half a million men, who are good citizens in every other respect, are to remain under this perpetual shadow, I believe that Society itself will be the ultimate loser.

The right which I claim for myself, and for all those like me, is the right to choose the person whom I love. I have

my own standards of morality about this; and they are not so very different from those of normal men and women. I do not wish to hurt another person; and for that reason I would not willingly persuade anyone to join me in a way of life which, whatever happens to the law, will always present grave and painful difficulties. I have no wish to corrupt the young, nor to convert to homosexuality—even if this were possible, which I doubt—any man who was lucky enough to possess normal instincts. I seek only to apply to my own life the rules which govern the lives of all good men: freedom to choose a partner and, when that partner is found, to live with him discreetly and faithfully.

Discretion and fidelity are, however, made almost impossible by the present state of the law. The promiscuous homosexual, who seeks his lover in the street, paradoxically runs less risk than the man who lives with another in affection and trust. In such a case, there will always be ' corroborative evidence ' of some sort; letters, photographs, the sharing of a home, can always be relied upon to convince a jury when one of the men concerned has been persuaded, by spite, jealousy or fear, to turn Queen's Evidence against the other. I know that this is true, because it is what happened to me. If my interest in McNally had been merely physical, I should never have gone to prison. It was the letters which I had written to him, expressing a deep emotional attachment, which turned the scales against me.

I came out into the world again expecting a good deal of hostility. People said to me: ' Now you will really know who your friends are.' Whenever I walked into a room, I waited for the whisper, the snigger or the insult . . . but they never came.

The twenty or thirty people who had been my most intimate friends had never wavered in their loyalty, although until the trial most of them had never guessed the secret which I had so carefully kept from them. They gave me great strength and comfort during the first difficult days, but I realised that I could not live the rest of my life in the shelter of their sympathy and friendship. These men and

women, much as I loved them, were not the whole world; and it was the world that I had to face.

When I went to the country to stay with my mother and father, I thought that meeting their friends was going to be the worst ordeal of all. There is probably no group of people more conservative, or less likely to understand a predicament like mine, than the middle-aged inhabitants of a small country town. I knew that they had all been extremely kind to my parents during the time when I was in prison, but this was no indication of their attitude towards me; in fact, I thought it likely that the more they sympathised with my mother and father, the more likely they would be to blame me for their distress. I was surprised and moved to discover that I was quite wrong. Although most of them avoided any discussion of the case, they welcomed me back as though nothing had happened. Of all the people whom I have met since my release, I perhaps appreciate the attitude of these the most, because it meant that they had searched their hearts and discovered there a wealth of humanity and tolerance with which I would never have credited them, and with which they might never have credited themselves.

The third circle into which I now moved was that of the men among whom I had previously worked. It is not easy to go back to Fleet Street when your name and photograph have been displayed on the front page of every newspaper, and I hesitated for some weeks before I did so. Again, I need not have been afraid. The men and women who work in Fleet Street may be cynical in some respects, but they are generous and delightfully frank. There was not a moment of embarrassment, even when I met the reporters who had ' covered ' the trial; there was no moral judgment and, I am glad to say, no pity.

I went back to Islington, feeling vaguely apprehensive about the neighbours. I had never spoken to any of them before, and I wondered how they felt about a man with an Oxford accent who came to live among them, re-decorated his house in a manner which probably struck them as obnoxious, and then proceeded to go to gaol. If they had resented my presence there, I thought, they had every

opportunity of showing it now. I began to sweep and dust the rooms and clean the windows, feeling rather depressed. After a few minutes the woman next door leaned out of a window and said that it was wonderful to see me back again, and was there anything she could do to help? I thanked her for her kindness and, feeling much better, went to the front door to shake the mat. Another neighbour stopped in the street, smiled, and said: 'Welcome home.' For the rest of the afternoon my work was punctuated by these greetings, and offers of assistance—did I want a hand with the cleaning? Was there any shopping they could do for me? They were just going to the launderette; could they take anything for me? And, like the reporters, they were perfectly open about it all. They did not pretend to think that I had been away in hospital or in Jamaica. They said: 'We read all about it in the papers, and we thought it was a rotten shame.' Nothing in my life has been more heart-warming than this welcome back to the place where I had made my home.

That is public opinion, so far as I am able to judge it for myself. I am a homosexual and a convict, but I have been allowed to return; and in that fact there lies a measure of hope for all homosexuals, and for all ex-prisoners. I have moved out of darkness, and into light. I should be untrue to myself if I did not help others to make the same journey.

Two months after my release from Wormwood Scrubs I was sitting, not without an awareness of irony, in the Distinguished Strangers' Gallery at the House of Lords. Below me, on the Woolsack, sat Sir David Maxwell Fyfe, now disguised in knee-breeches, a full-bottomed wig, the title of Viscount Kilmuir and the office of Lord Chancellor. It was hard to believe that this inconspicuous-looking man was one of those who had sent me to prison; I found that I was able to look down at him with no hatred. It was fear that had bred hatred in me, and I had cast them out together.

Lord Pakenham was speaking of his inquiry into the causes of crime. He said: 'I have, I believe, made a number of friends during this inquiry, on both sides of the fence. I

include among friends found in that way one or two who have recently been imprisoned and who bear well-known and honoured names, and who have borne themselves, as I have the best reasons for knowing, very bravely in their adversity.'

He said that he would not go into the 'very complex and sometimes very tragic questions associated with homosexuality,' which were being investigated by the Government Committee, but that he would like to draw attention to the failure of the prison system to carry out its declared aim, as described by the Chairman of the Prison Commissioners, Sir Lionel Fox: '*The purposes of the training and treatment of convicted prisoners shall be to establish in them the will to lead a good and useful life on discharge, and to fit them to do so.*'

The figures showed, he said, that only about one prisoner in six was receiving any training at all. He called on the Government to match words with deeds, and to reconstruct the Prison Service in such a way that it might carry out the reforms to which lip-service had been paid for so long.

Peer after peer rose to support him. From the Government benches Viscount Templewood declared: 'We know what ought to be done, but we do not do it. In certain respects, far from making any progress, we have actually fallen back, I would almost say 50 or 60 years.' The practice of locking prisoners up, three to a cell, 'would have horrified the great penal reformers of the past who made our system one of the best in the world'. Nothing was being done to repair the older prisons, and the idea of work in prison was still tainted with the idea of the treadmill—'we ought to revolutionise our ideas in this respect. Such work should be useful; it should be paid for at the regular rate of wages, and the wages paid should be allocated to the man's keep, to compensation for the victims, and to the accumulation of a sum for the prisoner when he leaves prison. . . . I am convinced that the best hope for many of these prisoners, some of whom may at first sight appear to be absolutely hopeless, is to make them work and take an interest in their work.'

I thought of the men whom I had left behind. Of the boredom, the squalor, the sheer nagging hopelessness of it all. The monotony, and the tenpence-a-week.

The Earl of Huntingdon suggested that a man who worked well should earn thereby some remission of his sentence; it was precisely the suggestion that Dan had made, months before, on the exercise yard. It was strange to hear it repeated in this vast Gothic hall, with the chandeliers and the brass rails and the carved gargoyles. The sanitary conditions in some of our prisons, said the Earl, would disgrace a Hottentot village. The system of sewing mailbags in cells at night, with only a 40-watt bulb for illumination, prevented prisoners from reading and ruined their eyesight. Toothache . . . epileptics . . . censorship of letters . . . chamber-pots. The earl was remarkably well-informed. 'If we are to educate prisoners to better standards,' he declared 'it will not be done by sending them into slum conditions.'

Lord Moynihan pointed out that, although this was a matter in which the Church might have interested itself, not a single Bishop had stayed to listen to the debate. He had heard of Borstal boys who had been asked: 'Are you a Christian?' and had replied: 'No, Church of England.' Many of these boys came from bad homes, 'either with fathers who are criminals themselves, or, much more often, with families who "couldn't care less". They have the wrong friends. They cannot go home to get help, because there is no help there. They get a little worse, and start on a life of crime. When they come out of prison, they go back to exactly the same surroundings. . . .'

I thought of Jimmy, and of Dan; of the penny-in-the-slot machine which had been the first milestone on Dan's journey to the Scrubs—perhaps, eventually, to Dartmoor.

Lord Chorley said: 'There are still in existence gaols which were condemned long before the First World War, and which are not fit to house swine, let alone human beings. . . .'

I looked around at the noble Lords beneath me. Very few of them had bothered to stay. It was half-past six. Of those who remained, several were asleep, their hearing-aids

drooping from elderly, blue-veined hands. The visitors' gallery was empty, except for myself. Lord Mancroft, Joint Under Secretary of State for the Home Office, took his feet off the table, glanced at the clock, and rose to make the Government's reply.

He was a smoothly handsome, youngish man in a beautiful suit, who would not have looked out of place in a motor showroom. His purpose this evening, however, was not to sell their Lordships a Jaguar or a Rolls-Royce; it was to sell them an account of the prison administration so grossly ill-informed that I could scarcely prevent myself from unscrewing the nearest brass gargoyle and throwing it at his brilliantined head.

'I will gladly deal with the important points which have been raised,' purred Lord Mancroft; and then proceeded to ignore every unpleasant detail of prison life which had been exposed, ascribing these to 'the sensational crime stories by ex-prisoners which appear in our Sunday newspapers'.

The Earl of Huntingdon had asked why prisoners were made to sew mailbags in their cells at night, when they might have been reading or studying for correspondence courses. Lord Mancroft elegantly sidestepped this by remarking: 'Many prisoners are incapable of anything except simple repetitive work—and that is the answer to the point which the noble Earl made about mailbags; that many prisoners could not handle the more complicated machinery which might be desirable for economic efficiency.' It was, of course, no answer at all. It was not even true. At Wormwood Scrubs there were machines capable of sewing mailbags in a fraction of the time which they took to do by hand, and there was no shortage of prisoners who had been trained to work them. The 'cell-task' was obviously a deliberate time-waster; tread-mill work, as Lord Templewood had said.

'Sanitation,' said the Government spokesman, 'has been mentioned by many noble Lords. Of course, nobody in his right mind would not admit that there is great room for improvement. We have exerted a great deal of effort to try to improve the Victorian sanitary conditions prevailing

in prisons, and shall continue to do so. But, barring the pulling down of all prisons, we have done about as much as we possibly can.'

I could spend a pleasant day, I reflected, taking Lord Mancroft on a conducted tour of the latrines at Wormwood Scrubs. We could start by having our breakfast in 'D' Hall, ten feet away from a lavatory whose contents had overflowed on to the floor. Then we could go to the Tailors' Shop, to see what happened when two W.C.'s were shared by eighty men. Later, preferably during a blizzard, we could sample those in the exercise yard, listening to the musical hollow clanking which was the only response when one pulled the chain. Finally, we could examine the slopping-out sinks on the landing, forever innocent of disinfectant; and so to bed, with a nice crusty chamber-pot for company.

'Food. . . .' said Lord Mancroft, with an appetising smile. 'I want to draw attention to food because, whenever food is bad, or someone complains, it becomes headlines in the newspapers at once. Food is now served in cafeteria trays, and is of a standard which might surprise noble Lords.' Yes, I thought, it probably might, particularly if they knew that the cafeteria trays had been washed in soapless water by prisoners who had not had an opportunity of cleaning their hands after going to the lavatory.

His picture of the facilities for training in prison was rosy and bright. Everyone who could possibly go to a 'training prison'—i.e. about a third of all imprisoned men—went there. The remainder stayed in 'local prisons' like Wormwood Scrubs, either because they were waiting to move on to another prison, or because they were 'quite unsuitable to be sent anywhere else'. I could hardly believe my ears when I heard this, but he went on: 'I do not wish to sing too highly the praises of the local prisons. They tend to become a sort of sump of the prison world, into which all kinds of people who cannot be fitted in anywhere else find their way. But, with this very unpromising material, we are doing the best we can with limited resources, with highly unsuitable buildings, with overcrowding, with under-staffing, and with the necessity to concentrate on discipline and safe custody.'

I had always wondered why the Commissioners had decided that I was to spend the whole of my sentence at Wormwood Scrubs, and now I knew. I was unsuitable, unpromising and unfit for anything but Major Grew's slummy and putrescent sump. So were all the friends I had made in prison. I wondered who made these decisions, and how. I knew that nobody had ever interviewed John, Dan, Charlie, Jimmy or myself with a view to discovering whether we were capable of improvement, or of being trained to lead a better life. Vic had been lucky enough to attract the attention of the Governor of a 'prison without bars', who visited the Scrubs occasionally in the manner of a prospective buyer visiting the Battersea Dogs' Home. We were apparently the mongrels whom nobody wanted. It was all right for me, but what about the others?

I suddenly felt ill and tired. I walked down the stairs and along the stone corridors, past the obsequious policeman at the door, and out into the roaring merry-go-round of Parliament Square. The scarlet of the buses hurt my eyes. Men and girls walked together, laughing. The pigeons strutted on the pavement. It was spring again, and the sparrows would be nesting.

It has been said that the purposes of punishment are fourfold. The main objects are to deter the wrongdoer and others, and to reform him; the subsidiary objects are to compensate the injured party and to satisfy the indignation of the community. I doubt whether any of these ends are best achieved by prosecution.

I do not believe that a homosexual can be transformed into a heterosexual overnight by the shock of prosecution and imprisonment. The most that can be expected is that he will, while still experiencing an attraction towards his own sex, refrain from giving way to it again. On the other hand, I have never met a homosexual who has resolved to mend his ways as a result of being imprisoned. The laws under which these men are prosecuted appear to them so flagrantly unjust that there is no question of their feeling any remorse or shame for what they have done. This attitude, which may

or may not be justified, is strengthened by the fact that no moral stigma attaches to adult homosexuality in the prison community. In this respect it differs from pederasty, or the seduction of boys; and under the combined pressure of disapproval from their fellow-prisoners and perhaps the realisation that their actions are morally indefensible, pederasts do sometimes decide that they will never succumb to temptation again. Whether they carry out these resolutions, I do not know.

It must also be remembered that once a man has been taught to look upon himself as a criminal there is a tendency for him to abandon his standards of morality, not only in the respect in which he has been prosecuted, but in others as well. In the unmoral atmosphere of prison, it is easy to look upon all authority as an anonymous and baleful 'They', to be cheated and disobeyed. This, as I have said, was the outlook of men like Dan who had spent all their lives in and out of Borstals and prisons. It was very contagious. Since we were all indiscriminately branded as criminals, we acquired an extraordinary tolerance towards each others' crimes. I was aware of the dangers of this tendency, and fought against it, but I was not always successful.

In most respects I had always been a singularly law-abiding person, paying my taxes, doing my duty in the War, obeying the regulations, respecting the Government, the Crown and the Police. It would not be honest to pretend that I still feel quite the same. It is easy to believe in Justice when you have not been caught up in its workings. It is easy to have faith in politicians, when you have not listened to them lying about issues in which you are vitally concerned. It is easy to believe in the benevolence and incorruptibility of the police, when you have never been a 'wanted' man.

I do not believe that the fact of my imprisonment, or that of Edward Montagu or Michael Pitt-Rivers, will deter a single person from committing acts such as those with which we were charged. Regrettably enough, I believe that the opposite may be true. I have already written about the

influence of the Wilde case, and it has often been pointed out that a crime of a sensational nature which receives wide publicity is often followed by a wave of imitations, committed by people of weak intellect whose imaginations have been inflamed by the newspaper reports. After we were arrested and remanded on bail, Edward Montagu and I received many hundreds of letters from such people, including young boys. One boy of 15 used to try to telephone me almost every day during the weeks when I was waiting for the trial to begin. I find this horrifying and am sincerely grieved to think that I may, however unwillingly and indirectly, have been responsible for such a thing.

The homosexual world is, of necessity, compact and isolated. It is also extraordinarily out of touch with reality. I have already mentioned that a number of homosexuals, respected and discreet, were courageous enough to offer evidence to the Home Office Committee when it was set up. These, however, were exceptional. The great majority of the homosexual community shrugged its shoulders, expressed the opinion that the law would never be changed, and carried on with its dangerous and tragic way of life. Our case caused a momentary flutter, and a number of the better-known homosexuals left the country for a time, until they decided that it was safe to return. I am obliged to admit that most homosexuals are furtive and irresponsible, and that if a more tolerant and just attitude towards their condition is ever adopted by this country it will not be through their efforts. On the other hand, they are perhaps not entirely to blame. Their secretiveness and cynicism are imposed upon them by the law as it now stands.

I do not know how far my prosecution acted as a deterrent. Its purpose as an instrument of reform concerns me alone.

Long before I was prosecuted, I had considered the possibility of submitting myself to a 'cure', if any such existed. I had discussed the question with a number of doctors, without ever discovering one who professed to be able to effect any alteration in my sexual bias. Psychiatrists, psychotherapists, psychologists and psychoanalysts derive a

large part of their incomes from men who fear that their homosexual instincts, if left unchecked, will involve them in prosecution and disgrace. It is not very surprising therefore, that there should be some resistance towards relaxation of the law among the official organisations of the medical profession. But individual doctors, if they are honest, will nearly always admit that there is nothing they can do. There is no magic cure. Extravagant claims were at one time made for treatment by means of sex-hormone injections. It has since been established that, although the injection of female hormones into a man produced a cessation of all desire, whether homosexual or heterosexual, the effect was only temporary and was sometimes accompanied by distressing physical changes. The man thus treated became a kind of hermaphrodite or eunuch, and suffered from the psychological upset natural to such a condition. A homosexual treated with male hormones, however, did not become more of a 'man'; his desires were merely intensified.

Psychotherapists claim that they are able to help in cases where the homosexual bias is weak, or when it is accompanied by self-condemnation or social maladjustment. The course of treatment is bound to take a very long time and cost a great deal of money, and its effects are always uncertain, depending on the willingness of the patient to be cured and the degree of trust which he feels towards his psychiatrist. Ironically enough, this kind of treatment is only likely to be successful with those who have failed to come to terms with their abnormality. With the man who has learned to accept his condition, it is almost certain to be useless.

In spite of this, it might have been possible for me to embark on such a course, if I had not been sent to prison. At Wormwood Scrubs, which is so often pointed out as a centre for the psychological treatment of offenders, the facilities for such treatment were not so much inadequate, as virtually absent. I met many men who had been told by judges that they were being sent for three, or five, or seven years to a place where they would be properly looked after

and encouraged to mend their ways; but nothing whatever was being done for them. Out of 1,000 prisoners at the Scrubs, only 11 were receiving psychiatric treatment at the time I was there, and only a small proportion of these were homosexuals. Dr Landers, the Principal Medical Officer, was an intelligent and honest man who admitted the limitations of the system; but I could not help feeling that he would be doing more good if he had devoted his efforts to improving the revolting sanitary conditions of the place, instead of concentrating on the highly problematical redemption of such a small group.

Once I was in prison, as I have described, I was not only not encouraged to take psychological treatment, but actively discouraged. Men in prison, whatever their crime may have been, do not merely remain as bad as they were when they came in; by a visible process of moral erosion which goes on week after week and year after year, they become worse. This is particularly true of sex offenders, and I do not pretend to have been any exception.

The essential reason for my imprisonment had been my tendency to enter into emotional relationships with men who were not, as Mr Roberts would say, my social equals. In prison, I was surrounded by such men. Partly because of the natural tolerance of their class, and partly because of the relaxed moral atmosphere of prison, they expressed no disapproval of my tendencies and appeared to expect that I should choose one of them as a companion; and that is exactly what happened.

There was never any doubt in the minds of the other prisoners—or, for that matter, of the warders—as to the meaning of my friendship for Dan Starling. There was nothing physical in it, because there could not be; but it was a friendship a great deal less selfish and more true than a mere physical attachment would have been.

Strangely enough, it helped me to find some measure of happiness in prison; and, even more strangely, freedom. I knew that I should never be afraid any more, or angry, or ashamed, whatever might happen to me afterwards.

There is not much to be gained from considering the prosecution from the point of view of compensation for the injured, because nobody ever pretended that the smallest harm had been suffered by Reynolds and McNally. On the whole, they did rather well out of it. The police took every possible precaution to see that their photographs did not appear in the press, and as a reward for their behaviour in court they were promised by the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Air Council that no action would ever be taken against them in respect of the homosexual acts with 24 other men which they had admitted. As a result of various sarcastic questions in the House of Commons they were, however, dismissed from the RAF. I do not know what career they took up after this, or where they are.

In all sincerity, I cannot really believe that the case was very successful in 'satisfying the indignation of the community'. It was McNally and Reynolds who were hissed and booed outside the court, not us. The Press comment, as I have shown, was almost uniformly hostile to the manner in which the convictions had been obtained. The Government was finally goaded into setting up a Committee to investigate the antique and savage laws under which we had been charged. When we came out of prison we found, not hostility and ostracism, but sympathy and acceptance from people in every walk of life. As an 'example', the witch-hunt left everything to be desired.

Perhaps the strangest feature of the case—and, indeed, of the law as it stands today—was the way in which it placed everyone connected with it in a position which was, to some extent, a false one. The Home Secretary, Sir David Maxwell Fyfe, was obliged to pretend that the 'crime' involved was of such a serious nature that any methods were justifiable, provided that the 'criminals' were brought to book. The Director of Public Prosecutions, Sir Theobald Mathew, in order to obtain convictions against Edward, Michael and me, had to act as though the offences admitted by McNally and Reynolds were, in comparison, trivial. Mr Roberts, QC, was forced to express a horror of homosexuality which contrasted strangely with his conduct of the Croft-Cooke

case. Lord Winterton, who had previously called for revision of the laws, was impelled—for reasons known only to himself—to adopt an attitude of hysterical condemnation. The prison officials had to keep up the fiction that I and my friends were criminals; the psychiatrists had to pretend that I was being rightly punished for something which they regarded as an illness.

The effect on me was exactly the opposite. I was able, at last, to move out of a false position and take up a true one. There was no further need for pretence; I could discard the mask which had been such a burden to me all my life.

When I first went to prison, an official asked me: 'Why do you think you were put on this earth? What do you think is the purpose of it all?'

I still do not know what my answer should have been. At that time, I was incapable of giving any. It seemed to me, during those first few days of solitude and degradation, that my life had been a hopelessly unilluminating one, from which no conclusions could be drawn. I was unable to find any moral in what had happened to me. I had tried to lead a good life, doing no harm to anybody, hating no-one and helping those who needed my help. But this had not been enough. When the time came I was not judged by what I had done; I was judged by what I was.

If my life had ended at that moment, it would have been a failure. It was necessary for me to redeem it if I could; to make it mean something, if only to me. / A man born with some defect of the body does not try to deny or to conceal his handicap; he acknowledges it, and does the best he can.

That, I decided, was what I must do for myself.