

an excerpt from the book:

## RELEASE

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### THE PRESENT

... It is a square, solid structure, fashioned of dark gray limestone. Even to the casual visitor who is guided to its location there is a feeling of foreboding, as though the somber stones are crying out against the outrages within.

Inside is a bare hall, save for an old desk and a tall potbellied heating stove, which oozes smoke and exhales the fumes of coal sulphur, and which, when shaken and cleaned, sends out and up a dense barrage of fine, acrid ashes. The stove is there to keep the guard warm, for feeble, indeed, is its attempt to heat the dank, frost-bitten building it occupies.

On each side of the enclosure are two rows of cells, one above the other. In front of each cell is a solid wooden door, in the center of which is a covered peephole. Just behind this door is an inner one made of case-hardened steel bars. The only light that filters into the cell comes from a small window set high in the outer wall, which is heavily barred on the inside, and which is covered by a thick iron grating on the outside. In one corner is a foul-smelling and battered waste bucket. This, with a quart tin cup, comprised the furnishings. In these dungeon cells the penalty is paid by him who dares to break the prison law.

It is winter time. The cells are cold and seeping moisture. The stone floor is damp and icy. The air has a dank density, like the interior of an old-fashioned ice box. I enter the place to begin my sentence in this black hell, wrought by man, God's choicest creature. The ironical mockery of it does not penetrate my fog-bound consciousness.

I have a premonition that is undefined and which is overshadowed by a cruder feeling that my sentence will end in death. But beneath both of these is an extremely delicate sense of something whose importance eludes me. This I know: I shall never weaken to the point where I beg like a dog for my release. I am equally sure that the deputy warden will hold fast to his promise. Not by the widest stretch of my imagination can I conceive that he would suddenly go soft, become chicken-hearted, weaken in his resolve to break my spirit and to make me whine for mercy. Such an event would throw him completely out of character. No, I feel doomed as I enter, a determined feeling that I am embracing a self-willed death, slow and paralyzing, and indescribably painful.

The keeper of the "hole" is a stolid, thick-bellied, lumbering giant of a man, with a short, heavy neck, a massive, coarse face, and a closely-cropped, low-browed head. Set deeply in a pair of pouches are two small, piggish eyes, which remain dull even when his great hulking body is shaken with anger. To the convicts the keeper of "the hole" is known as "The Bull."

He takes an instant dislike to, me, a sentiment which I return full measure, pressed down and running over. After I am stripped of my clothing he searches them. Then he turns his attention to my nude body, peers into my mouth, and examines me with frank suspicion, as he paws me with vulgar, ham-like hands, hoping to find some small instrument that could effect my escape or suicide.

Defeated in this exploration, he gives me a thin, filthy blanket, a pair of unwashed cotton socks, an old pair of overalls, filled with the stench of their former victims, and a torn and faded shirt whose last wearer must have gone mad in a foaming fit, so stiff is the shirt's front.

Wearing these, I enter the dungeon. The Bull locks the steel door, and orders me to put my hands through the bars. I elevate them to a crossbar just above my head and obey his order, leaving an upright bar between my arms. The Bull clamps a pair of handcuffs around my wrists. With a parting curse he bangs shut the solid door. I begin my suicidal defiance of the deputy's iron will.

I know, of course, what this is going to mean. Each morning at six I am going to be chained up in this manner, after having been permitted to partake of a piece of bread and a cup of water. At six in the evening they will let me down for the night, when there will be another piece of bread and another cup of water. In the meantime, I shall have suffered the torments of suppressed bodily functions, or the loathsomeness of having had to exercise them.

I know that the maximum length of time for strong men in the cuffs is fifteen days; for the average, ten and for the weakling, five. At the end of fifteen days the arms and legs are blue and swollen, the veins and arteries are enlarged and tight, while the bottoms of the feet are puffed and black with congealed blood. By this time the arms and legs are lifeless during the period in the cuffs. In its effort to pump blood into these dead members the heart becomes dangerously weakened. So the doctor will order me down at the end of the maximum sentence. Or so I think.

But this period comes and goes. I lose track of time. I hang my last day in the cuffs, for I have lost the power to stand. They lift me up to put me in them this morning. After this day—for many weeks after this—I just lie on the icy floor, emaciated and unspeakably filthy. They keep me alive with additional nourishment now. Death must not defeat the deputy's will. But I no longer feel hunger. To the cold I am inured, insensate. Each morning the deputy opens my solid door, pauses silently, tempting me to crawl to him and accede to his wishes. My only reaction is hatred for the man. I am now sustained by hate. The darkest curtain imaginable veils the future to the human consciousness.

## THE FUTURE

*How was I to know that the deputy warden would release me voluntarily? That he would permit the doctor to put me in the hospital from which I had planned to escape? How was I to know that even "The Bull" would become friendly, and the doctor alarmed about my condition? How was I to know that I would be trusted in one of the most responsible positions inside of prison walls, that of night nurse with its opportunity to traffic in all sorts of contraband, to say nothing of the opportunities it offered in aiding convicts to escape? How was I to know that one day I would be a respected member of society, honest and industrious? How was I to know that God's healing power would flow through me to others? That my prison doors would swing open five years in advance of the time set for my release? That a helpmate would be waiting outside for me ready to assist in the reconstruction of my broken life?*

But I shall tell you how it all began.

## WONDERMENT

A curious new thought eddied across my brain as I lay there with my hate and misery. Suddenly I became aw; that all my life I had been a dynamo of energy. It had been years since I had entertained a constructive train of thought. Hence, this was a new and strange experience. It slipped up on me, so to speak, as a sense of wonderment. I began to wonder about my past life and what it would now be like if I had employed my energies and will power toward self-improvement and a genuine self-interest.

*What followed is rather difficult to catch in the pattern of words. There were subtleties of feeling in it, elusive overtones too remote for external description. To adequately apprehend such purely mystical sentiments one would have to experience them. I might describe the state as a gradual approach to that condition of consciousness wherein there seems to be a complete vacuum, a suspension of all volition. The drift toward the state was characterized by a mild, dreamy sort of delirium in which I seemed to live half awake and half asleep.*

*That I was approaching what is commonly called mystical experience, I now know, but did not know at the time. At the point I have described as a 'vacuum', I was keenly aware of a revolutionary change taking place in my life. It was as though I were being reversed; or having been upside down, was now being set a-right. For a long time I dwelt in an indescribable sense of awareness.*

*Then I began to dream in a confused and pointless way. Fragments of my life's experience, with neither beginning nor end, drifted mist-like across my mind. They seemed neither good nor bad-or at least my reactions to them were indifferent. This type of mental activity went on for several days and nights.*

*Finally and quite suddenly the form and content of these dreams changed. They now began to reveal consistency and continuity. They became rational and logical in form and sequence. Too, they were highly sane and beautiful in form and essence, filled with meaning and implied purpose. Then into my memory came the fact that I had known these dreams before—when I was a child. I became aware that I was dreaming of the man I had been trying to avoid for many years, Jesus the Christ.*

*The day came when he appeared to me as in a garden. And I remembered that this had been a childhood dream repeated in my subjective experience many times over .It was all so similar! His physical appearance, the quiet and vivid clarity of it, the thematic details, the rapturous feelings and the exalted thoughts it gave me! And now it seemed to be so purposeful!*

*He came toward me, his lips moving, but not vocally. He paused near my side and looked down, deep down into my eyes, as though through them he were trying to penetrate my soul. In all my life I had never seen or felt such love in the human eye as now glowed and radiated in his eyes Nor had I ever felt myself so utterly helpless in the captivity of love. By some mysterious faculty of perception which operated in the midst of my dream, I seemed to know clearly that I was submerged in Reality; that I was seeing and feeling something that would influence my life throughout all eternity.*

*The scene faded out casually like some finer substance undergoing alteration, and becoming a formless mist which curled and drifted, eventually forming itself into one word of gossamer, irregular letters. The word was LOVE. This, too, vanished, leaving me for what seemed an age enveloped in an unspeakable state of mental clarity. As I had previously felt myself receiving love, I now had the joyous sense of bestowing love. It poured from me in*

*gratitude and blissful tears. I loved all men. I hated only the evil conditions they imposed upon each other and upon themselves. I loved the world. I loved God. Then I dreamed again.*

*Once more the form of the dream was like a scroll or a motion picture film being unwound. There was no pain in it this time; it was all elation, ecstasy. All the people I had injured directly and indirectly came before me again and this time I gave them love, which seemed to soothe and heal their hurts. Then all the people who had injured me appeared. One by one I began to help them and love them. It was all exceedingly vivid. Out of the scroll a great auditorium took form. There was a huge audience. They were all the people I had injured and who had injured me. I spoke to them concerning love as one who had the right to speak with authority. I was aware that my diction was positively flawless, my enunciation matchless. So vivid was this, I found myself entertaining a parallel train of thought in which I seemed to be assuring myself that I was not dreaming, that I was surely awake, and that I would never forget these words which were flowing over my lips in such incomparable cadences of love and conviction.*

*Thus, as a recipient of love, I became a transmitter of it. It seemed to rise from within me and flow outward, as though generated from some interior source. The joy and bliss and gratitude I felt was past articulation, and was wholly uncontainable. In the midst of such feeling I knew I must either be changed or I would die.*

*I was grateful not for any particular thing, but for all good, for life itself. I had no discernment apart from this nameless clarity of thought and perception, this boundless enchantment of universal love and reality. I knew that I had transcended all personal and bodily limitations of habit and environment which had bound me through the years. I had no sense of my prison walls, but my thoughts roamed the imponderable Universe far and clear. The measurements of Time and Space vanished out of my consciousness. I was free. I knew I was free. I had found the Reality within the actuality, the breath within the breath, the consciousness within the consciousness, the soul within the form. And above all, I knew that I was being what the theologians call "re-born."*

To this day I am not positively certain as to why this experience became a new and different chapter in the book of my life. Nor am I sure as to just how it was brought about. A few men and women who claim knowledge of such things have told me that it was due to my mother's pronounced religious impulse, which was also harbored secretly by my father. This, they claim, was inherited by me. The intense outer conflict with the forces of law and order had acted to compress my true character until, in a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion, a rock-bottom crisis was reached, those finer energies were released, and the soul burst through the weakened barriers and swept upward and onward into a new order of expression.

If this be so, if the self-willed suffering of my life had anything to do with it, I can only say that I did not suffer in vain. For a single second in which Reality is known is worth a lifetime of misery.

I do not propose, however, to offer an explanation of the experience. If an explanation or defense were needed I feel now; as I have always felt, that it would have been given me at the time.

I am intensely interested in superphysical experience as an experientialist. I have read quite widely on the subject from the works of those who have themselves passed this way. This range of reading has given me much information of a biographical nature. It has shown me an assortment of widely different personalities and temperaments, who for an instant found

the veil removed from ordinary vision, permitting them to catch a glimpse of the wider world and a more distant horizon. Possessing the literary gift, they have been able to relate their experiences with some measure of accuracy, but as to *why* and *how* they join the union of silence.

William James in his *Varieties of Religious Experience* attempts the psychological explanation of such experiences in others. But of his own Adirondack experience his explanation is pitifully inadequate. Here he admits that he did not know what it was or why it was. He is content to refer to it briefly and without meaning as "a boulder of impression."

In my prologue I have put down other psychological explanations. *Apparently that which is superconscious transcends and thus defies the ordinary processes of conscious transmission.*

When I consciously returned to my dungeon environment the state of my mind was no longer the same. It had power to give me joy but not pain. The cell was illumined with a new kind of light, the light of my own redeemed eye. It was the same dark, cold place; but now it was warm and congenial. It became the reflector of my glowing inner self. My imagination was exceptionally keen. I began to experiment with it immediately. I decorated the barren damp walls with things of beauty and quality. I appointed the cell with a fireplace and a mantel, with rugs and tables and deep chairs. When I had finished I had done the job well. The color scheme was harmonious and the placements correct. Everything was in good taste.

Next I invited guests. I still wonder if they were mere figments of my imagination. They were always the same. I willed it, and they appeared. Did I imagine them or did they take advantage of an opportunity I offered? Can any great literary genius affirm that the powerful characters moving through his pages are his creations? My characters were men, each a composite figure in his own orbit. They all moved in an aura of allegory. They stood for Love, Wisdom and Faith. Taking their seats before my imaginary fire they would engage in a sort of exalted symposium, quite oblivious of me sitting in the foreground, a one-man audience. The things they discussed are etched upon my memory today things that would no doubt tax the reader's credulity, but that have never ceased to act as a beneficial influence in my life.

In this experience my old fears vanished, but a new one, which was born out of the experience, appeared. This was the fear that I would be released from the dungeon, and thus, perhaps, in different surroundings, might become divorced from my joy and serenity. I greatly preferred to remain apart, hugging to myself the raptures of my newly-found freedom. I was, however, protected even from this elevated temptation, this exalted suicide, which inevitably leads to selfishness and in the end to spiritual bankruptcy. Jesus had turned away from this course, preferring to share rather than to clutch to himself the heavenly estate.

Before this experience I was an ingrained and calloused criminal. After it I was as completely healed of my criminal tendencies as anyone could be healed. Too, this healing has given me a certain reach and practical utility, the like of which I could not have attained otherwise.

The experience left me with an energy which is felt as a sense of assurance and ability. It may be more precisely called *faith*, the common meaning of which Professor Glenn Clark describes in his "Fishers of Men," and which weaves like a strong thread through his finer work, "The Soul's Sincere Desire." In reading these volumes one has a definite sense of faith as a practical as well as a spiritual energy, which is applicable even in the training of athletes-

an energy that can be consciously applied to business, trade, profession, and in fact, to any practical and needful services of the world.

To cite an example of the application of this energy: At the time of the experience, while not entirely illiterate, I was, nevertheless, inarticulate from the standpoint of ordinary education. I could read cheap literature after a fashion, and I could manage a legible note or brief letter.

Following the experience, I was strongly drawn to the parables of Jesus and whatever jokes I could secure from Lincoln. For in these latter I seemed to perceive the content of the parable. In other words, out of my experience I was left with a curious but persistent interest in parabolic writings

Two parables of Jesus in particular interested me, "The Prodigal Son," and "The Parable of the Vine." After reading the former a number of times, I felt the vastness of its theme and the matchless perfection of its literary quality. I seemed almost impelled to write a short story after the manner of this parable. What is more, despite my limitations, I felt that I could do it.

Finally, annoyed by the urge, I secured some wrapping paper and began the task, I named my story, "There's Another Law," which dealt with the theme of retribution. The finished story missed the pattern of the parable by a million miles, but I got permission to send it outside to a friend, who in turn sent it to *Detective Story*. The editor liked it, bought it, and wrote me a letter asking for more. I was elated over this bit of success and decided thereupon to make a career of story writing. Later I obtained a correspondence course in the art, studied it diligently, and began to bombard my friendly editor. All my other efforts missed the mark. They came back with an unbroken regularity. I might have done better if I had remained true to my first model.

## THE MIRACLE WORKER

There was in my experience an instant which, for want of a better name, I have called a vacuum. The actual miracle of healing happened in this instant. What went before was but a prologue. What followed was but an epilogue. The miracle-working power was love. Of that I am convinced. Of its mystery I know less as I learn more. Through the years which have followed the evidence has piled up. There is miracle magic in love. I do not know what love is. I gather examples of its workability. I know it has a practical utility, as well as a spiritual glory. I know it never fails to change the thing it touches. Out of disorder it brings order, out of chaos harmony. The examples of this crowd my life and the files of my personal mail. No revelations as to what love is come through, save that it is Reality, that it is greater than man's power to define. It fills all space, and without it nothing could survive, no planet could wheel, no insect flit, no plant grow-nothing could be born, and nothing could be reborn, except for the miracle work of love.

I have learned something of its ways. This for instance: The miracles wrought by love power are seldom obvious, Love works quietly, like an artist at his task, an inventor at his bench, a scientist in his den of wonders. There are many major similarities between love and science, love and art, love and invention. Science, art, and invention are content to do the thing, to act and to let the result happen. Too, they allow their fruits to preach for them. In the heart of an artist, scientist, inventor there is little desire to reform the world or anybody in it. Their motive is to achieve. This is their drive. If this is done the world will benefit.

But there is a major difference. The fruits of science, art, and invention can be turned against humanity. Love heals the wound it does not make. There is a selfish emotion that hurts. It has often been called love. It is but the shadow of the miracle worker.

Just as science, art, and invention do not desire to reform anybody, neither does love. By not wanting to reform others it transforms them. By setting others free, love binds them. A friend is a lover. He does not preach, find fault, condemn. He frees; and the thing he frees he binds. You cannot have the thing you will not give away. You cannot be free of the thing you hold. To hold on is to belong to the thing held, a *bond*. What you set free belongs to you. You do not belong to it, for you belong to love. To be in bondage to love-this is the needful thing, for then all good belongs to you. To belong to less than love 'is to be the slave and not the master. To belong to love is to have life and life abundantly, for then life belongs to you. To belong to life is to be in bondage to Time and Space. All things below love encircle and squeeze. They press and inflict and hurt. Love is Reality, the liberator, the miracle worker. By making others glad, love brings them the foretaste of heaven on earth.

Jesus knew the great miracle-working secret. He didn't preach to the multitudes. He went about telling stories and loving people. Simply by loving them he healed them. His love excited their love, and in love they were set free, their lives changed. Always this happens where the well-springs of love are unloosed. *No one with love ever fails*. No one without it ever succeeds. Love does not force a thing to happen. It lets the thing happen. The next thing is always the best thing for the compassionate. A forced success puts one in bondage to work. The end is tension and boredom. One must maintain by force that which is born out of time by force. The lover plays at his task. No motion is lost. He achieves more in an hour than the forcer achieves in a day. The latter is bound by his achievement. In his achievement the former is set free....

Do I know the mystery of love, the liberator, the life-giver, the joy-maker? No. I know of its fruits. For the present I am content with this. To ponder love philosophically is fascinating, no doubt. But I'd rather see it work, actually. My friends, who like to speculate upon abstract theories, may smile at this. But it is as far as I've gone. The philosophical "why" of love may come later. In the meantime I'll continue to gather evidence and pass out reports.

There is surely miracle magic in love. And love does things so naturally and simply. You have to pause and think about it before you can see the miracle in the result, so well does love hide its handiwork. It is rarely sensational, obviously phenomenal, spectacular. Love just laughs and plays at the game of life. Where love is, work is play, and play is always creative work. Wherever love caresses, confusion and disorder vanish, boredom, the great vice, melts, inertia dies, inharmony is swallowed up, old fears fade out, old wounds are healed, leaving no scar tissue, resentments and grudges are impossible, cheap gossip and tawdry fault-finding disappear: joy and health are established, life becomes gladness, optimism and good-will, the sufferings of others are shared and released. Love gives freedom to all without in the slightest degree allowing freedom to be twisted into license.

Love never plucks a soul prematurely. It is content to aid the ripening process and do the plucking in time and season. Nor does it force the ripening with undue persuasion or play upon fearful emotions concerning the wraths and judgments of God. Love knows that God is tender and merciful, that man is judged by his own judgment, condemned by his own condemnation, impoverished by his own greed and mass selfishness. Love waits for man to come to himself,

to weary of his self-willed futility, arrogance and suffering, to tire of the darkness that condemns himself and generations yet unborn. Love knows and waits for opportunities to act. No opportunity is offered which love does not seize. It reaches twice as far as man is willing to reach. The creature's failure is love's chance.

It was so in my case.

Nor does love ever seek to amend itself with reason, logic, common sense. Love is the supreme reason, the matchless logic, the robust common sense. Love makes the ordinary things extraordinary, the common things uncommon, the weak things strong, the little things huge, the low things high.

Love knows that like attracts like, that love excites love, and that to love the neighbor is to excite one's love for God, "To love is always to know; but to know is not always to love." The love that knows is spiritual. The other love is intellectual. In the former love redemption is present, release for the soul. The latter love has light without warmth. Spiritual love is the sun, both light and warmth. Intellectual love is the moon, a reflector of light, but not a generator of heat. Spiritual love is the Son of God. Intellectual love is the son of man, who has not yet dreamed what manner of man he is to be. Spiritual love is Christ-centric. Intellectual love is egocentric.

Intellectual love, therefore, cannot equal the power in spiritual love. But by the persistent and purposeful practice of intellectual love, spiritual love can be excited. At the point where the *love thought* fuses with the *love feeling* the miracle happens, healing takes place, order appears, the soul unfolds her wings.

Hence the needful thing is to love. There is no prison door visible or invisible, which love cannot open, no prison stripe which love cannot melt. There is no fear or worry which love cannot use to good advantage, not by forcing the fear out, but by transforming into lifting power the energy which fear and worry generate. What, then, happens when the force of sin meets the power of compassion? Both the sinner and the compassionate are lifted up to the heavenly consciousness. "I am kept in heaven by the energy of sin," said a saintly man to me one day. With bright, twinkling eyes, a glow of gratitude upon his face, he explained the process:

"The Lord sends the sinners to me. I sit down with them and do nothing but love them and listen to their troubles. They are filled with negative energy, which they pour out to me. My love for them transforms that energy as fast as they release it. Pretty soon they are empty. A peace has come. Because of their trouble we have both found heaven on earth. Being in heaven they are healed, and I am blest. We have served each other: the sinner serving most." Oh, yes, there is miracle magic in the power of love.

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1946