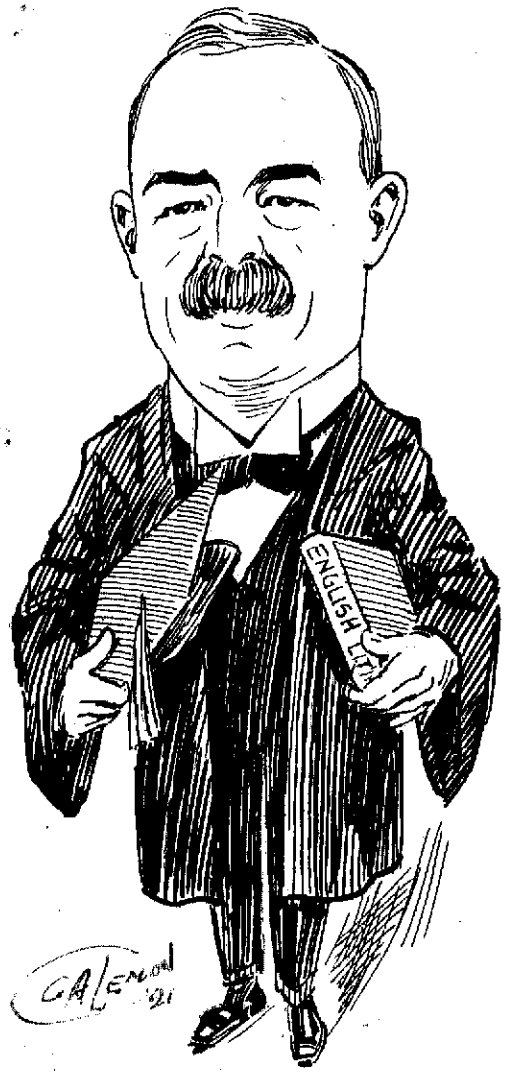

Caricature of Albert Lewis in academic robe by G. A. Lemon, September 10, 1921. Warren H. Lewis Papers, Box 1, Folder 6, Item 2. Marion E. Wade Center, Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL. Reprinted by permission.

An Imaginative Tale from the Father of C. S. Lewis

Crystal Hurd

In September 1921, artist G. A. Lemon drew a caricature of Belfast Police Court Solicitor Albert J. Lewis for *Ireland's Saturday Night* newspaper. In it, the astute attorney grins behind a well-groomed mustache, framed by a parenthesis of dimples. His crisp white shirt is crowned with a neat bow tie, covered completely by a scholar's robe. In his right arm is a mortarboard with a dangling tassel. Beneath the illustration is this description: "If the world of letters were upside down / And books of quotations were no more to hand / Mr. A.J. Lewis would still 'meet the case' / With the choicest of gems at his tongue's command." Tucked under his left arm is a volume titled "English Literature." One may ponder why the title reads "Literature" and not "Law." This is due to Albert's abiding devotion to words. Despite his successful career as a solicitor in the public courts, Albert had aspirations to be a writer. He wrote three surviving stories, attempted a novel, composed a few paragraphs of an autobiography, and penned many poems during his lifetime. His first love was the written word, and this passion was one his sons inherited with great enthusiasm.

Albert's penchant for argumentation and his affection for literature developed early on. Indeed, his interest in words led him to develop a robust vocabulary, and his father noticed that Albert had great promise as a rhetorician. For Albert, arranging words dramatically to persuade his

audience was a great enjoyment. Warren characterizes his father[1] in *The Lewis Family Papers* in this fashion:

> With a vivid imagination and a love of rhetoric, Albert possessed an almost Chinese sense of drama: like that people, he saw life in terms of a stage play—sometimes a melodrama—in which it behooved him to give of his best in whatever role chance or his own inclinations had temporarily cast him; and the desire to give a finished performance would often betray him into the absurdities and injustices which his own better nature would condemn.[2]

His destiny, one that differed greatly from his father and brothers, seemed secure from an early age. Albert James Lewis (1863-1929) was born in Cork as the youngest of six children to boilermaker Richard Lewis, Jr. From his youth, Albert was recognized as the "cleverest and least commercially minded" of his sons.[3] Therefore, his father began to consider a different life for Albert. The family moved to Belfast in 1868, moving closer to the shipping industry to increase Richard's business opportunities. Albert later recounted that being sent to Lurgan College was due to constant domestic squabbles with his brothers. Both the *Lewis Papers* and *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis* captures a story in which Albert had caused his brothers' ill will. His brother Richard Lewis III ("Uncle Dick" to Warren and Jack) protested that "We can't stand this fellow James [i.e., Albert] any longer."[4] Although Albert admitted that his turn of fortune could have been provoked by sibling strife, Warren, in transcribing the *Lewis Papers*, believed that the plan was purely to accommodate Albert's

[1] For more information on how Albert's sons viewed their father, see Crystal Hurd, "*The Pudaite Pie*: Reflection on Albert Lewis," in *VII: Journal of the Marion E. Wade Center*, 32 (2015), 47-58; Warren Hamilton Lewis and Clive Staples Lewis, "*The Pudaite Pie*: An Anthology," in *VII: Journal of the Marion E. Wade Center*, 32 (2015), 59-68; Bruce R. Johnson, "*The Pudaite Pie*: Appendix, Corrections, and Selected Commentary," in *VII: Journal of the Marion E. Wade Center*, online supplement, forthcoming.

[2] Warren Hamilton Lewis, MS, *The Lewis Family Papers or Memoirs of the Lewis Family (1850-1930)*, 11 volumes, 1933-1935, Marion E. Wade Center, Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL, 2:61. Both *The Lewis Family Papers* and *The Story of a Half Sovereign* copyrighted jointly in the name of both the Marion E. Wade Center and the C. S. Lewis Company, 2020. Used by permission.

[3] Warren Lewis, *Lewis Papers*, 2:61.

[4] C. S. Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, ed. by Walter Hooper, 3 vols. (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2004-7), 1:811.

burgeoning intellect and increase his opportunities. Albert attended the national school in Belfast until 1875, briefly attended the Academy there until 1877, and began attending nearby Lurgan College that same year at the age of fourteen.

At the time, Lurgan College was under the leadership of W. T. Kirkpatrick, known affectionately by C. S. Lewis and his biographers as "The Great Knock." As a matter of fact, Kirkpatrick was widely praised and respected. Although Warren writes that he was "a joy" to his students, he simultaneously served as "a terror and a potent stimulant of youth" due to his "an abhorrence of cant and loose thinking."[5] It is to Albert's credit that Kirkpatrick fostered a lifelong friendship with him. Albert's dexterity with language, which made him so effective in the courtroom, was due to Kirkpatrick's assiduous preparation. Kirkpatrick consulted Albert on legal matters and eventually took both Lewis sons under his charge to tutor them for university entrance exams. In fact, early in Albert's career, Kirkpatrick called him a "leader writer."[6] A year later, Kirkpatrick—who was himself a man devoted to the persuasive power of language—writes to Albert to say, "When you once get your hand in, woe to the poor jury man who wants to have any mind of his own. He will find himself borne down by a resistless Niagara."[7]

Like his sons after him, Albert had aspirations to be a writer. Transcribed speeches and opinion pieces often appeared in the local papers, especially after he began to frequently speak on conservative values. Eventually, Albert became a popular and well-respected speaker in Belfast, giving several speeches endorsing conservative candidate James Corry. His father Richard appreciated Albert's early rise to success, writing that one of his articles "impressed a person with the idea of having been written by a grey bearded statesman, or politician at all events."[8] In reference to the same article, Richard's business partner John MacIlwaine wrote, "I think with practice and experience, you should make a really good writer, and I hope you will stick with it."[9]

[5] Warren Lewis, *Lewis Papers*, 2:324.
[6] Warren Lewis, *Lewis Papers*, 2:76.
[7] Warren Lewis, *Lewis Papers*, 2:87.
[8] Warren Lewis, *Lewis Papers*, 2:83.
[9] Warren Lewis, *Lewis Papers*, 2:84.

On 10 June 1885, Albert passed his solicitor's exams. He had apprenticed with Jasper Boyle of McLean, Boyle, and McLean since August 1880, and his results were not surprising; he "qualified with distinction."[10] His speeches drew enthusiastic crowds, although some listeners were a bit critical of his exuberance, a criticism later echoed by his son Jack. During this time, Albert's speeches hint at political aspirations beyond local government, possibly towards a seat in Parliament. However, he abandoned that plan to serve as police court solicitor instead. In addition to his consulting work with political clients, Albert represented several municipal organizations, including the Belfast City Council Counsel, the Belfast and County Down Railway, the Belfast Harbour Commissioners, the Post Office, the Ministry of Labour, and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.[11]

His efforts as a police court solicitor were celebrated in the papers, but personally, Albert was often disappointed at the prejudice and discrimination, as well as the tireless jurisdictional red tape, that the courts often displayed towards his impoverished clients who could not afford representation. Warren writes of Albert: "Throughout his life he showed unfailing generosity to the poor and kindness to the unfortunate, both in money and in free professional services, the latter often of a lengthy and arduous nature."[12] Albert's sustained frustrations with the justice system is fully illustrated in "The Story of a Half Sovereign," in which a poor man is placed in jail on Christmas Eve for attempting to pass a counterfeit half sovereign. Later, it is determined that the half sovereign was indeed real; it is assumed a forgery because the protagonist keeps the coin in a pill box that had eroded some of its engraved properties.

Correspondence and speeches from the *Lewis Papers* illustrate that Albert's work as a police court solicitor was for him a moral, as well as a civic, duty. Originally, Albert's motivation was to gain "success in life" as an energetic and enthusiastic conservative politician. As his court solicitor career was taking off, Albert found his court work more rewarding and remained in the office for nearly thirty years. Once his law career blossomed,

[10] Warren Lewis, *Lewis Papers*, 2:115.
[11] C. S Lewis, *Collected Letters*, 1:1006.
[12] Warren Lewis, *Lewis Papers*, 2:66.

Albert shifted his artistic sensibilities toward writing fiction. Many of his fictional efforts were inspired by true events that Albert experienced in court. He was moved by some of the cases that were presented, especially those that involved discrimination against the desperately poor. In his diary he gives an account of a pathetic woman charged with stealing a blanket she used to clothe her naked infant:

> 1890, May 29. A woman—poorly clad and distressed looking—was brought up today charged with stealing a blanket, the property of a Poor Law Guardian. It appeared that she had been admitted to the workhouse with her almost newly born child. The child, then and now, was almost naked. She had stripped her bed of its blanket, and having procured by some means a pair of scissors and a needle and thread, she had made the blanket into a petticoat for the child. The petticoat is beautifully made—a pattern cut out round the border and tastefully hemmed, showing dexterity and taste and the pride wh[ich] springs from love.[13]

In letters exchanged with Albert in February 1914, Warren admits that he is studying Military Law and finds it astonishing that Albert has spent "the best 30 years of your life grubbing with the law. The appalling littleness and trumpery quibbles of the whole thing, bore and annoy me."[14] Not to be harshly judged, Albert replies,

> My poor profession! In a sentence it is swept into the boot hole! Yet there is "some truth to what you say." But you must remember that when I decided on the law as a profession, it was with the ambition of becoming a great advocate—not to become a rag gathering in the dust heap of quibbles and precedents. That ambition was cast aside for another ambition which I realized, and which have [given] me fourteen very happy years. But I am not greatly in love with the law as a trade.[15]

Albert admits that his ambition was to become a "great advocate" in public policy, but now his newer ambition was to use his wits and wisdom to deliver justice, fight corruption, and most importantly, provide a stable

[13] Warren Lewis, *Lewis Papers*, 2:177.
[14] Warren Lewis, *Lewis Papers*, 2:144.
[15] Warren Lewis, *Lewis Papers*, 2:145.

home for his wife and two sons. Warren writes that, " I have heard his managing clerk relate that not one, but many times, he has seen Albert throw open the door of the inner office and hustle out a would-be client with the words, 'In fact, you want to make use of my legal knowledge to help you commit a swindle! Get out of this!'"[16] His efforts have been recorded in Belfast papers throughout his tenure. There is little doubt that Albert enjoyed his career and was satisfied with his work, although he often seemed preoccupied with court matters long after returning home for the evening.

In Volume 2 of the *Lewis Papers*, Warren collected all of Albert's undated short fiction together. There are three stories in total: "Put a Penny in the Slot," "Major Smith and Mr. Pie," and "The Story of a Half Sovereign." In December 1890, the weekly periodical *Tit-Bits*[17] declined to publish "Put a Penny in the Slot." Albert then wrote a letter to the editor requesting an explanation and adding, "It relates facts which came under my notice as police prosecutor in this city some time ago."[18] "Put a Penny in the Slot" begins with the sentence, "As no man is a hero to his own valet, so no man's profession is romantic in his own eyes."[19] This line bears a modest resemblance to the first line of Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield*, "Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show."[20]

[16] Warren Lewis, *Lewis Papers*, 2:65.

[17] *Tit-Bits* was a weekly English periodical first published on October 22, 1881, by publisher and editor Georges Newnes. It offered a variety of articles in an easy-to-read format to encourage young children to foster a love of reading. The magazine was mentioned by the likes of G. K. Chesterton, James Joyce, George Orwell, H. G. Wells, Virginia Woolf, and James Hilton.

[18] Warren Lewis, *Lewis Papers*, 2:178.

[19] Warren Lewis, *Lewis Papers*, 2:178.

[20] (London: Penguin Classics, 2016), 13. Albert immensely enjoyed Dickens's work, as did his younger son. In fact, a manuscript titled the "Easley Fragment" illustrates Jack's early imitation of Dickens's style. The fragment, featured in Volume 28 of *VII: An Anglo-American Literary Review* with an introduction by scholars David C. Downing and Bruce R. Johnson, highlighted the same wit and humor found in many of Dickens's beloved works. See David C. Downing and Bruce R. Johnson, "C. S. Lewis's Unfinished 'Easley Fragment' and his Unfinished Journey," *VII: An Anglo-American Literary Review*, 28 (2011), 6-7. The fragment was written during fall 1927 and illustrates Jack's keen sense for "Dickensian characterization" applied to Irish culture. Perhaps because the fragment was composed during a trip to visit his father, the piece makes numerous references to "Irish politics." Like Dickens, the text carries all of the pathos for the disenfranchised *underdog* (i.e., Irish men) in light of the "rotten English government": "It would be a fine return for the sacrifices which Ulster has already made, to drain her of the last of her manhood and leave her defenseless for the Southerns to invade us whenever they want." Here, Jack presents, perhaps unintentionally, an homage to Dickens, several years after his father had attempted to achieve the same style in his own fiction.

"The Story of a Half Sovereign" also reflects Albert's devotion to the Dickensian narrative tradition. Dickens biographer Michael Slater states in his preface that Dickens is often characterized by:

> extraordinary dynamism, his organisational genius and notable capacity for business, his lifelong concern for the poor, especially children, his multifarious and energetic charitable activities, his deep interest in crime and punishment, prison and the detective police... his passion for the theatre . . . his love of Christmas, his obsession with order and fascination with disorder, his worship of the domestic hearth.[21]

Some of Charles Dickens's themes and personal fascinations were shared by Albert Lewis. For instance, "The Story of a Half Sovereign" takes place at Christmas, much like Dickens's beloved tale *A Christmas Carol*. Similar to the standard Dickens tale, "The Story of a Half Sovereign" also features a poor protagonist who suffers under the cruelty of the wealthy and affluent, yet who clings to faith during his tribulations. Slater mentions that Dickens's journalistic work often inspired his fictional tales. Parts of *The Pickwick Papers* are inspired by a political scandal in Australia: "Dickens's experience of seeing at such close quarters how an older man's totally innocent behavior towards a woman could be deliberately misrepresented by unscrupulous lawyers seems likely to have suggested to him an idea for developing a main plot for *The Pickwick Papers*."[22] Albert, like Dickens, was thus suitably placed to make such observations through his employment in local courts. Both men used real situations to craft fictional tales.

"The Story of a Half Sovereign" follows the poor fortune of an impoverished man named Henry Gray on Christmas Eve. The story highlights the misery and disenfranchisement of the poor juxtaposed with the rich and privileged, including, and especially, those who inhabit government

[21] Michael Slater, *Charles Dickens* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), x.

[22] Slater, *Charles Dickens*, 74.

offices. Albert illustrates this disparity when he describes Gray wearing a "threadbare" jacket and "bad boots" as he heads to the poulter to buy food for Christmas dinner. Summoning all of the money he has, Gray pulls a half sovereign from a pill box. The suspicious woman behind the counter examines the coin and determines that it is counterfeit. She then passes the coin to the shop master, who, after a close examination, agrees with his employee. Instead of confronting the poor man, the pair leave him waiting on his change until the police arrive. In the meantime, Gray is hounded by the shopkeepers and the "press men" (newspaper boys) outside the shop. According to regional accents, these individuals appear to be from English working-class backgrounds bearing a "cockney" dialect.[23] This is especially true of the use of the term "passil" for "parcel." Comically, Miss Blizzard, the shop woman, is attempting to speak more eloquently to the policemen but slips back into her working-class accent. The policeman's use of "hup" implies that he is most likely situated in the middle class.

Despite his pleas of innocence, Gray is carted off to jail on charges of counterfeiting currency, while his wife and children—shivering at home—now must go to sleep with no dinner. He is overcome with despair and begs the magistrate for an opportunity to visit his home long enough to explain the situation to his wife. The constable refuses, locking Gray up all evening in the local jail. The next morning—Christmas morning—Gray is brought before an apathetic judge, Mr. Harrow. His pleas for innocence are scoffed at, given his poor appearance. He is assumed, in his poverty, to be guilty of the charge.

What follows during the court testimony is a comical (and Dickensian) exchange involving the shopwoman and the magistrate. The shop owner Mr. Roper testifies, providing a straightforward account of the events which took place. Gray has no witnesses but pleads innocence of the crime. He then asks that the coin be inspected, which the magistrate protests is "utter folly and a waste of time of the Court." Gray swears that the coin is authentic and further explains that he had previously been employed at the law firm of Messrs. Lane, Brown, and Watts. Gray lost his job after he fell ill and spent all of his savings on medical expenses. His plea moves Mr.

[23] My sincere gratitude to scholar Alexander Smith and writer Judith Millar of Belfast, Northern Ireland for their assistance in detecting the origin of the accents used in the story.

Harrow to set his bail at ten pounds (to be paid in five pound increments). Sadly, Gray does not possess any money, and he is then scheduled to return to court to be tried by the judges of Assize, traveling judges who ruled on criminal cases, usually just four times a year.

Due to his inability to pay bail, Gray must await trial until February. On a rare visit from his wife, he begs her never to tell the children that he is in jail. His wife Nell responds, "And all because we are poor, Harry." Yet Henry waits patiently to present his case to the Judge of Assize: "To be called upon to face a criminal charge; to discern no light through it; to see beyond it a long term of imprisonment, and to know that in the eye of Heaven you are pure from the taint of crime—this is agony."

During Henry's second trial, Miss Blizzard and Mr. Roper once again testify. One of the jurymen then questions the abrupt judgement that the coin is counterfeit. The Crown's Council, a Mr. Bishop, laments the lack of an expert in the case and requests an adjournment to collect "scientific evidence." After lunch, Jeremiah Shortsinger is called to the stand. Shortsinger is a former goldsmith, "now a dealer in coins and bric-a-brac," and declares that the coin is authentic. Shortsinger then asks for permission to address the defendant Gray, inquiring where he carried the coin. When Gray responds that he carried it "in a pillbox," Shortsinger realizes that the mercury in the pills corroded the luster on the coin. The story ends on a pleasant note when the shop owner Mr. Roper pays Gray one hundred pounds "in full settlement of all claims and demands whatsoever." Albert's note that the decision was said "on circuit" to be well advised implies that Roper was persuaded by officers of the court to supply reparations to Gray and his family.

"The Story of a Half Sovereign" resembles traditional work of the late nineteenth century. It possesses a trace of its ancestors in echoes of Dickens, as well as some similarities to the genuine issues featured in the Irish courts during Albert's tenure as solicitor. However, beyond its significance as a simple story, "The Story of a Half Sovereign" serves to demonstrate the political and spiritual climate in which Warren and Jack developed. Their father's insistence on personal integrity and biblical morality, his early frustrations with privilege among the ruling class, and his conviction to perform his Christian duty were not lost on Albert's sons. Although Warren and Jack expressed some frustrations with their father, mainly with his overbearing personality, his death left a great vacuum.

Some speculate that it was Albert's death in 1929 that prompted the spiritual conversions of both of his sons. Additionally, Albert's penchant for quality fiction—referenced in his daily conversations, his correspondence, and his speeches—created an inherited legacy of appreciation for literature.

The Story of a Half Sovereign[1] "The Law's an ass"[2]

ALBERT JAMES LEWIS

It is Christmas Eve and the joy of the children has come. It is to be a "white" Christmas in earnest. Snow has been falling steadily all day, and garden walks, flower beds, plants, and all lowly things are hidden beneath the smooth, dazzling fleece.

In the city, half-melted snow lies ankle deep on the street and footway to the great discomfort of the hurrying crowd. Night closes in, and still the white flakes come steamily down, deadening all the bustle and stir of the city, and filling the air with an unusual tranquility. Light-hearted children, escorted from shops to cosy broughams by guardian mothers, strive to catch the flakes as they fall. Bus drivers descend from their perches and brush the white load from their shoulders. Policemen stand in doorways, or beneath arches, and shake the encumbrance from their cloaks. But in the heart of all there is the same feeling: We may quarrel with rain and

[1] The manuscript presented here has been transcribed as exactly as possible from the original typescript. Punctuation and spelling are kept. The exceptions are that paragraphs have been indented instead of left justified and typographical errors have been corrected with editorial brackets, e.g., "behoved" has been modified to "beho[o]ved." Other editorial comments are included in notes to the text.

[2] Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (London, England: Penguin, 2009), 436. "'If the law supposes that,' said Mr. Bumble, squeezing his hat emphatically in both hands, 'the law is a ass—a idiot. If that's the eye of the law, the law is a bachelor; and the worst I wish the law is, that his eye may be opened by experience—by experience.'" Note the subtle change from "a ass" in *Oliver Twist* to "an ass" here, perhaps to avoid a grammatical distraction.

storms at times, but we are seldom angry with snow. It comes with the season of peace and good-will, and perhaps because it is looked upon as the handmaiden of that season, it is seldom received with malediction.

The clock in a neighbouring church had just struck ten, and already the throng in the streets was thinning, when a young man turned out of a by-way into one of the main thoroughfares of the city, and paused for a moment before the pastry cook's window. Very tempting to a hungry man is the display there, but still more tempting on Christmas Eve to the father of hungry and joyless children. There are Father Christmases standing on pyramids of plum cake, and diminutive Christmas trees growing in a delicious soil of pastry, and a hundred other things which would gladden the heart of the little ones at home. But they are not for him, and with something of rebellion in his heart against his lot, he turns away and resumes his journey down the sloppy street.

Let us look at him as he passes under the light of the gas lamps. His jacket is threadbare, darned at the elbows. His boots are bad, and he has no coat to protect him from the driving snow. His cheek is hollow and very pale. But notwithstanding, there is in his carriage something which gives the lie to any suggestion of crime or dishonor. As he meets the policeman on his beat, he does not step into the shadow of the buildings and slouch by. He gives him look for look and goes his way. The policeman knows the article when he sees it, and muttering, "Down on his luck, poor beggar," turns the light of his lantern into some recess in quest of the other article with which he is more familiar.

At the end of the street is a shop where the business of a poulterer and butcher is carried on, and here the young man halts again. He looks for a moment at the plump geese and turkeys, and lest the idle envyings should arise again, he passes straightway down to the rear of the shop where the coarse fragments of meat are sold.

Here he makes his humble selection, having regard more for quantity than quality, to the disgust of a sour faced virago who presides over that department. While his purchase is being parcelled, he takes a small pill box from his pocket, and having extracted a half sovereign from this novel purse, lays the coin upon the counter. The lady of forbidding aspect hands him his parcel and lifting the half sovereign, moves up the shop towards the cash drawer. On her way she stops suddenly to look at it, and then goes nearer to the gas light and examines it closely. She has evidently satisfied

her own scruples, for she moves across the shop to where her liege and master sits in corpulent pomposity, enthroned in a box like office. She lays the coin before him and jerks her head in the direction of our threadbare friend, who, unconcerned, with his back towards her, is scanning the land of marrow and fatness. A few words of conversation pass between them, the master examines the coin, then beckons a shopman, and the woman returns to her counter. "I've sent for YOUR change, mister", she says, and makes a pretense of busying herself behind the counter. The few customers in the shop complete their purchases and depart, and the young man is left alone. "Will that change be long in coming?", he asks after some minutes have passed.

"Long or short mister, I reckon you won't go without it". He puts this down as another sneer at his poverty stricken appearance, and remains silent. While he stands waiting, he hears footsteps behind him. He turns toward the door, and finds himself confronted by the master of the shop and a policeman.

"This is the man," says the shining well fed lord of the establishment, as he eyes our poor lean creature with contempt, "I charge him with attempting to pass this counterfeit half sovereign."

"I suppose there aint no doubt," chimes in the lady, proud of her capture.

"He comes in 'ere and he puts down the 'alf sovering. I swers that."

"Me." exclaims the culprit with contracted brows and eyes staring wildly at the woman, "Are you speaking of me?"

"Oh, no, not at all. Some other gent entirely."

"Your name, miss?" Says the policeman, and notes it, "Mark the coin so as you'll know it again, and put it hup in a piece of paper, will you? Now mister, you'll have to come along. You aint asked to say anything, but anything you says may be given in evidence against you afterwards. You'll both attend in the mornin'?" This to the accusers.

"Rayther!" Says the lady.

"Evenin' miss, evenin' sir," and the policeman and his charge pass out into the street.

Not until he is alone with the policeman does the prisoner realize what all this means. Not until his thoughts turn to this wife and children whom he left half an hour ago with a promise to return soon, does he comprehend his position in detail. He thinks how the children will watch and ask for

him until they must go to bed without their expected supper. How his wife will await his return all night, in a fever of anxiety and dread. How on the morrow, should he fail to satisfy the magistrate of his innocence, he must go to jail and leave his family to struggle against the strong black current of poverty. To be buried alive, to pass from them without a word to comfort them, without them having the hope and expectation that he will one day return—the thought is maddening. He stops abruptly. "My God, this is horrible!" He exclaims. "Can nothing be done, constable? As I hope for salvation, I am as innocent of this charge as your wife or child. Can I not return home for a minute to tell them, and bid them good-bye? Can you do nothing for me?"

"Come on," says the policeman with almost a note of sympathy in his voice, "Can't be done anyhow. Perhaps things won't turn out so bad. Don't get down hearted." Then after a pause, "Blest but I am sorry for the Missis and little 'uns if you've got 'em. Christmas Eve too! There's only one night in the year when I shirks dooty and it's this blessed night. But dooty's dooty you know."

At a street corner a group of "press men" proclaiming their latest editions, take an interest in the case.

"'Ullo, here's a cove been Liftin'!" says one as they stand aside to let the pair pass.[3] "Paper passil," says another.[4] "Ought to have know'd better at his time o' life. You can't slip sich as them into your waistkit pocket and cut."[5]

"Weight's been against him in this handi-cuff."[6]

Then as they pass out of sight, the humourist of the party shouts after them, "Merry Christmas, mister!"

They reach the police station, the charge is entered, the prisoner gives the name of Henry Grey, and is passed into the cells. At home, the enquiries of the children have been evaded and they have gone supperless to bed. The wife sits down to ply the needle which for many months now has provided their scanty fare. But her wonder gradually gives place to fear. The fire burns low, and still she works bravely on. No thought of replenishing it enters her mind. She shivers as she wraps herself in her old cloak. She can endure cold, but not a child's cry for bread. One o'clock. Two o'clock. And still she is there, watching and waiting, but her heart has sunk

[3] British slang: ullo= hello; cove = chap, fellow; liftin' = shoplifting.
[4] A paper parcel.
[5] "You can't put something in your waistcoat and cut out (or take off)."
[6] "A weight has been put on him with these handcuffs."

very low. And while she yet sits by that cold hearth stone, the first bells of Christmastide burst on her ears and awaken memories of long ago. From a neighboring tower, the "Adeste fideles" breaks forth—the Christmas hymn of her childhood and her father's house. The cup is full; the work falls from her hands; and broken hearted with poverty and care and watching, she finds relief in tears.

On the day after his arrest, Grey was brought before Mr. Felix Harrow. Mr. Harrow was not a bad man—only loud. When his temper was ruffled, he jarred upon your nerves like an east wind. On the day in question when he took his seat in court and was informed by the clerk that there were eighty cases on the book, he became absolutely boisterous. The claims of eighty miscreants had torn him from the bosom of his family, and he set himself to break record in dealing with those claims. The first prisoner is put forward, the constable enters the witness box. The clerk, who has taken a meteorological survey and finds the wind chopping round to the East, trims his sails accordingly and hands the Testament to the witness. He plays his part in the record breaking performance as follows—"The evidenceyoushallgivecourtbethetruthwhole truthandnothingbutthetruthshelpmeGodsworn".

Magistrate. "What's the charge?"

Constable. "Drunk and creating a disturbance on the street."

Magistrate. "Have you anything to say?"

Prisoner, of the Irish lineage. "Your Honour, it was nerves. I wasn't drunk at all. There was an argument—"

Magistrate. "Fined twenty shillings."

At the end of twenty such cases, Mr. Harrow takes the time. Great Scotland Yard! He has done that "lap" in something under half an hour. If he can only "stay" he will be home in time for luncheon. He works like a Briton—i.e., like [a] Briton on piece work[7]—for an hour and a half, and then his Mazeppa[8] progress is brought to a stop by Grey's case, which demands something more than a lightening consideration.

The prisoner is put forward, and the pale face of last night is paler, save when a hectic flush comes upon it. He is unkempt and unshaved, and his eyes tell of a night of feverish anxiety. But he stands boldly forward and looks around the room in vain for a friendly face. The constable is sworn,

[7] Financial compensation in which an employee is paid for each completed task.
[8] A fast-tempo piano composition by Liszt.

and in a few words tells the circumstances in which he arrested him. The Magistrate asks if the prisoner made any answer to the charge, and the honest constable answers with alacrity, "Oh yes, your Worship, he over and over again declared his innocence."

"I have no doubt," replies the Magistrate with a sneer, "the declaration is not absolutely original. We have heard it here before." Mr. Harrow should really be more careful. His clerk has a mild attack of convulsions. It is not in human nature to remain tranquil under such a joke.

The next witness called is Mary Ann Blizzard, the shopwoman. Her face has lost none of the acidity of last night, in fact, it looks as though it had been made and fashioned during the existence of the American product which bears her name. She has been accompanied to Court by a "lady friend."

Of all the plagues that Heaven sends upon an unfortunate Magistrate, that of a talkative woman, anxious to shine in the eyes of one of her own sex, who will describe the scene to "the neighbours" is the greatest. They had a bad time of it once in Egypt, we know, but think what a plague of woman's [women's?] tongues would have meant!

The last murmur of the oath is still on the clerk's lips when Miss Blizzard begins:

"Last night Your Worship, which was Christmas Eve—"

"Indeed!" says the Magistrate.

"—the prisoner comes into our shop—Mr. Roper's shop that is. Perhaps your Worship knows it? Two hundred and twenty two and two hundred and twenty four Staunton Street, Poulterer and Butcher and licensed to deal in game—"

"Yes, well?"

"Well the prisoner he comes into our shop and walks straight up to my counter. There are three counters in our shop. One—"

"Oh!" groans the unfortunate Mr. Harrow, "just tell me what the prisoner did."

"Yes, your Worship, I'm just going to do that. Well as I was saying, the prisoner, he comes up to my counter which is at the end of the shop. Well, as I sees him coming, says I to myself—"

"Oh, this is awful! You mustn't tell me what you said to yourself. Tell me what the prisoner said to you, or what the prisoner did."

"Beg parding your Worship. Well he comes straight up the shop to my counter, which is at the end—"

"My goodness, woman, he's been at your counter for the past five minutes! Will you get on! What did he DO?"

"He tried to 'do' me. But with all respects, your Worship, this aint no ordinary case, and you'll never be able to understand it without the DEtails which nobody knows but me."

"It's not Details but NINEtails[9] you should get," says the worthy magistrate in an aside to his clerk.

Amid interruptions and bickerings and threats and bellowings, she tells the story and identifies the coin. She leaves the witness box with—metaphorically—flags flying and bands playing, while the wretched Harrow is as limp and exhausted as a piece of wet blotting paper.

It is said that when the Queen of Sheba was done with Solomon, there was no spirit left in her, and when Mr. Harrow and Miss Blizzard parted, the Magistrate was in like evil case.

The next witness is Mr. Roper. Smiling, and shining, and fawning, he tells his story. He is sure that he sympathizes, as we all must do at this festive season, with the prisoner in his distress; regrets that it was not possible, with due regard for public morality, and the high principles of commercial integrity which he has always endeavored to impart to those around him, to pass over the occurrence; and wishes it to be distinctly understood that he is not prompted by vindictiveness and does not press the charge unduly. This completes the case. The prisoner is asked if he wishes to call any witnesses or make any statement, and he answers as follows:

"I can call no witnesses, for all those who took part in the transaction have already been examined. But I wish to make a statement. In the first place, I am entirely innocent of the crime which is charged against me."

Mr. Harrow begins to fear that this is the prologue to a swelling tale, and that he is in for a speech, so he says, "Hadn't you better reserve your statement for the Judge of Assize?[10] I'm sure he will give it all the consideration it deserves."

"I hope in God that I shall stand before no other judge than your Worship on this charge. If you will only hear me for two minutes I can

[9] A whip; short for "cat-o'-nine-tails."

[10] The courts of Assizes, or "assizes," were courts held on a periodic basis in England and Wales. The court consisted of traveling judges called "Justices of Assize," who ruled on a variety of cases, mainly criminal charges on a "circuit," usually once every three months.

tell you a plain, truthful story, which I think will convince you. I have said that I am innocent, and I say so because I believe the coin to be a perfectly good one."

"Such a statement is an insult to common sense," replies the magistrate, looking for any excuse upon which to silence him and dispose of the case.

"May I see the coin?" said Grey, "for though you may doubt the truth of the statement, I do assure you that I tendered it in payment in all honesty, and without examining it."

"Certainly you may see it, but this pretense is utter folly and a waste of time of the Court."

The constable hands him the coin, and as he examines it, he sees for the first time that the charge against him is no mere vapour to be blown away by protestations, however truthful. The side of the coin which Dick Phenyl[11] calls "woman"—ribald language is that of Dick, which one would not expect from an exponent of the laws of our Sovereign Lady—is his accuser. The head which stands in relief, and the frill round the edge of the coin, are of a dull silver colour. It is plain at a glance, that it has been manufactured from some silver alloy, and afterwards dipped in a wash of yellow metal. This coating has been worn off the projecting parts of one side by the friction of usage. He hands the coin back to the constable and continues:

"I can't explain it, but I know that if the money is bad, I am a dupe and not a knave. I am innocent."

"You have said that before, and really I have something else to do than sit here all day listening to that parrot cry," says the judge losing his temper at the dread prospect of missing his lunch after all his break-neck exertions. "If you have any witnesses, call them."

"I have said already that I have none."

"Then you must go to trial."

"Not before you hear me," [says] Gray, desperately clinging to this last hope. The Magistrate throws down his pen and leans back in his chair, while the clerk below him feels that he would like to throttle the talkative knave who is ruffling the temper of his Court.

"I am by occupation a clerk, and was, until five months ago, in a

[11] Dick Phenyl is a character from *Sweet Lavender*, a play in three acts written by Arthur Wing Pinero first performed in 1888.

situation in the house of Messrs. Lane, Brown, and Watts, of this city. Any member of that firm will give me a character."

"Lost your situation. I see," says the Magistrate, who has not yet learned that as steel sharpeneth steel, so a reply increaseth conversation.

"Yes, through sickness," continues the prisoner. "Five months ago I fell ill. I have a wife and three children," he tightens his grasp of the rail in front of the dock and hurries on. "At the beginning of my illness I was nursed at home until our savings were spent, then I went into hospital. I recovered but slowly, and only left the hospital three weeks since. My old employment was gone, and my strength was low. But worst of all, I was in poverty. May you never know what that means, and the unjust suspicions that follow it! But beyond my poverty, God knows that no person can truthfully bring any charge against me or mine. Last week I met a friend whom I had known when things were different, and I borrowed a sovereign from him. I changed that sovereign in a shop in River Street, which I can point out. I got a half sovereign in change, and I put it in my waist coat pocket. That is the half sovereign which you have before you now. As I have said, I am too poor to employ any person to defend me, and to be poor in England is to be a criminal, notwithstanding the lies that are preached to the contrary. I have told you that I have a wife and family. I left them last night to go and spend our last half sovereign, and they are still watching for my return. If you are a husband and a father, have pity on me, and give me the opportunity of proving my innocence. I am not afraid of jail, but I am afraid of the cruelty and suffering and nameless wrongs that lie in wait for a starving woman and her children. Do you hear those bells? Do you remember what day it is? They are declaring the birth of a higher law than yours which says, 'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.' As you expect mercy, show it to me now."

All anger had passed away from Mr. Harrow. He is leaning forward on his desk, listening and watching in surprise and sorrow.[12] In his heart, he is convinced, but he is tied and bound by form and precedent. In a low, sympathetic voice he says,

"I regret any harsh expression I may have used just now. I hope and believe that your story is true. I cannot discharge you, but what I can do,

[12] The next sentence is crossed out in the manuscript: "For twenty years he has sat in that dingy room, and never before have words like that come from the dock."

I will do. I will accept nominal bail for your appearance at the Assizes—yourself in ten pounds, and two sureties in five pounds each. In the meantime I must return you for trial. I shall see that any message you wish to send to your wife is taken to her at once."

Five pounds! As well might he have asked for five thousand!

Gray's chin falls upon his breast, and he is led back to the cells.

Gray was sent for trial in December, and the Assizes did not begin until late in the month of February. On the day following his committal, he saw his wife. When they were left alone, and the tears which she struggled hard to restrain, feeling that it was her duty to encourage and console him rather than distress him, were brushed away, they set themselves resolutely to plan ways and means for her support and his deliverance. She must sell the clock, the last wedding present that remained, and the picture which her sister, now dead, had painted for them. She must go to his last employers and tell them of the trouble which had fallen on him, and ask that one of them might attend at the Assizes and speak of his honesty and truthfulness. She must also go to the grocers at the corner of River Street and ask for an old man who wore spectacles and spoke with a Scotch accent, to be present at the Assizes to give evidence if he remembered him, that he had changed a sovereign in the shop. Yes, she would do all that. Was there nothing more she could do? Yes, there was one thing more. He took her hands, and gazing into her anxious, tearful eyes, he said,

"Nell, my brave hearted Nell! You must promise me by the love which has supported us through all our trials, that whatever happens, the children shall never know that their father has been in jail." With a great sob that rose from her breaking heart, she gave the pledge and sealed it with kisses.

Then they sat for a few moments holding one another's hands, and she told him of the indignities and insults she had suffered at the jail gates. Of the passers by who had stared at her, the coarse dissolute wretches who had jostled her in their eagerness to obtain admission themselves, of the questions and cross questions, and the obscene mirth of the turnkeys.[13] The story wounded him like a dagger.

"And all because we are poor, Harry," she said.

"Yes! Because we are poor. But you mustn't come to this pest house again, Nell. Come to the Court when I am being tried. I shall feel braver in your presence; but don't come here again."

[13] A jailor.

They sat in silence, looking at one another, and in the hearts of both was an unspeakable dread. What if he should be convicted and sent to jail? He could not endure the thought, and rising hurriedly, he clasped her in his arms for a moment, then said through his choking tears, "God Almighty preserve you, Nell," and left the room.

As the cheerless days went by—today as like yesterday in monotony as the ticks of a clock—Gray became more despondent. He had walked too much through the by-ways and shady places of life, to be of a sanguine disposition, It is true that for a time he had hoped to secure his release by a plain, unvarnished tale, judging it rather in the light of his own conscience than in the light an outsider's skepticism. But reflection told him that he hoped for too much. He knew how little sentiment surrounds a criminal trial—that it is not usual to recognize in a dishonest act, an honest motive. What answer could he make to the charge? Had he bought goods and tendered the coin in payment? Undoubtedly. Was the coin spurious—a counterfeit? No person who had seen it would doubt it. What evidence could he tender to show that he was not the maker, as well as the utterer[14] of the coin? None. The facts seemed unanswerable. Fortunately, the suffering which he endured during those two months of waiting is laid upon a few men. To be called upon to face a criminal charge, to discern no light through it, to see beyond it a long term of imprisonment, and to know that in the eye of Heaven you are pure from the taint of crime—this is agony. Nor was this all. Amid the loneliness which was oppressive, and a stillness and gloom which might be felt, he had in every waking moment the thought of his wife battling with poverty, and his children growing up, perhaps to an inheritance of crime. It was hard, very hard, to bear.

At length the assizes came round. On the Sunday before his trial he attended service in the jail. And, Oh! How he prayed those words, often listened to heedlessly before, but which came home to him now with a personal meaning: "That it may please Thee to Succour, help, and comfort all that are in necessity, danger, and tribulation."[15]

He was taken to the Court-house the next day and put upon his trial. The judge who presided was a great man. But he had one failing, which perhaps helped to display his greatness. At the Bar he had been famous as

[14] Under common law, uttering is when a person offers as genuine a forged instrument with the intent to defraud.

[15] A petition from "The Great Litany" of the Book of Common Prayer.

a criminal prosecutor, and he had still a hankering for the conviction of prisoners. Learned, humourous, just, but with the old professional desire to win, strong within him—this was Mr. Justice Pink.

When Gray was put forward, he was asked by the clerk if he had any person employed in his defence. He answered in a subdued, respectful tone which caught the quick ear of his Judge, "No, My Lord. I have not; I could not afford to do so."

He is indicted for colouring a counterfeit coin or piece of metal, with intent to make the same pass for a gold coin, namely a half sovereign, and on other counts.

The clerk explains to him his right of challenge, and begins to call a jury. While this goes on, he looks round the Court and sees his wife as near him as a spectator may come. Her face is lit with hope and encouragement; but how pinched and pale and sickly looking!

Mr. Bishop leads for the Crown. In a few words he states the charge made against the prisoner, and the evidence by which he proposes to support it. He allows himself a little flutter at the close and asks the jury to stamp out a crime which would "paralyze the commerce and demoralize the trade of this great city."

The constable is disposed of in a few questions, and then Miss Blizzard is called. She is snubbed at the outset by the Judge, and in consequence bridles her loquacity. He had only said, "Be good enough to answer questions—no more." But his look and tone taught her that all judges are not alike, and that this was a creature differing in species from Mr. Harrow. He was not to be "taken in hand"—it was thus that she described her treatment of the Magistrate—and upon this occasion she left the box with a remorseful sense of lost opportunities. The prisoner asked her two questions. Had he sufficient time after tendering the coin in payment, and before he was arrested, to leave the shop if he had wished to do so? Had he, when he was accused of the crime, instantly repudiated it? Yes, she believes he had.

Mr. Roper is called; still fawning, still shining, still grandiloquent and still sympathetic, he tells his story. He has just left the witness box when one of the jury, who has been diligently masticating a pen since the coin was passed round for their inspection, awakens from his ruminating and addresses the Judge: —

"My Lord, what evidence have we that this 'ere is a bad coin?"

"A very proper question, sir." Says the Judge—it is always a proper question when the judge sees his way to answer it; it is always 'irrelevant' when it is a poser,—"So far the only evidence you have is the evidence of your own eyes, which if I might form an opinion is very clear evidence." Laughter from the VERY junior Bar. "If you will examine the coin, you will see that it is made of two metals; a groundwork of white metal with a coating of gilt—like any ordinary criminal."

The point has not entered their bucolic minds, and so he drives it home. "Every criminal has a coat of guilt, gentlemen."

"Oh, they 'see it the noo,'"[16] and the reporters note much laughter.

"You will see that the gilt has worn off the projecting parts, leaving the base metal bare. Her Majesty's mint had not yet begun to manufacture coins of that description."

"Well, my Lord," replies the stolid juryman, "I may tell you that I won't convict any man of 'paralyzing commerce and demoralizing trade,' as that gentleman calls it, on my own suspicions."

The Judge looks at Counsel for the Crown, and says:

"It IS usual Mr. Bishop to have the evidence of an expert in such cases."

Mr. Bishop confers for a moment with the Crown Solicitor, then replies,

"Perhaps Your Lordship will adjourn for lunch now. I shall be prepared to call scientific evidence when we resume."

The Judge consents and rises; Counsel scampers away to the Bar room, and the prisoner is led back to the cells.

When Gray was again brought forward, a little, shriveled, parchment faced old man had taken his seat in the witness box. To the Counsel for the Crown he made answer as follows:

"What is your name sir?"

"Jeremiah Shortsinger."

"What occupation do you follow?"

"I was formerly a goldsmith. I am now a dealer in coins and bric-a-brac."

"Have you considerable experience in testing coins—that is with a view to ascertaining whether they are made of base or pure metal?"

"I have."

[16] "Oh, they 'see it in the now.'"

"Do you hold in your hand what purports to be a British half sovereign?"

"Yes."

"Have you tested the coin?"

"I have."

"Is that a spurious coin?"

"It is not."

"What!!"

"It is not."

"Do you swear that is a good half sovereign?"

"A perfectly good half sovereign."

"What do you mean?" interposes the Judge.

"What I say, My Lord, that this is a perfectly good half sovereign."

"Do you see the parts of the face of it where a white metal shows through the gilt?"

"I don't think a white metal shows through the gilt, My Lord."

"Then how do you explain the appearance it presents?"

"May I ask the prisoner a question?"

"Yes. It's somewhat irregular, but I'll allow it."

The old man addresses Gray.

"Where did you carry this coin?"

"In my waistcoat pocket."

"Have you any other coin in the same pocket?"

"No."

"Or any stone?"

"No."

"Did you carry it in a purse?"

"Of a sort."

"What sort?"

"Well, I carried it in a pillbox."

"Were there any pills in the box at the same time?"

"Yes, during part of the time."

"What sort of pills were they?"

"I don't know. I got a prescription from the doctor, and had the medicine compounded by a chemist in Newington Street."

"Have you the prescription still?"

"Yes, this is it."

The old man reads the prescription while the whole court is hushed with excitement. Then the shadow of a smile passes over his wrinkled face, as he turns to the Judge and says:

"There it is, My Lord."

"What?"

"The principal ingredient in these pills is mercury. Parts of one side of the coin coming in contact with them and rubbing against them, have become mercurialized or silvered—hence the white luster. I am glad I came here today. Do you wish to ask me any further questions sir?"

"No, thank you," said Mr. Bishop.

There is a hurried consultation among the representatives of the Crown, then Mr. Bishop rises and says:

"My Lord, we do not propose to go further with this indictment."

"I cannot allow the case to be withdrawn from the jury now, Mr. Bishop. Do you offer any further evidence?"

"No, My Lord."

"Then gentlemen," said the Judge addressing the jury, "it is your privilege and duty to make the only reparation that YOU can make to a man who has suffered a cruel wrong. I direct you to find a verdict of not guilty."

In a few moments the prisoner and his wife are in the street. Words cannot tell their joy; it is as deep, as strong, as incommunicable as their love for one another.

"It was not a merry Christmas, Harry," she says, "but I feel in my heart that it has all been for the best. 'They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.' It may be that our troubles end here, and that henceforth there is laid up for us peace and joy and plenty for evermore."

She was right. Next day the first gleam of prosperity shone upon them. It was said "on circuit" that Mr. Roper was well advised when he paid Gray one hundred pounds "in full settlement of all claims and demands whatsoever."