

THE STRANGE CONFERENCES  
CANTERSTONE JAIL.

Oliver Mankell was sentenced to three months' hard labor. The charge was that he had obtained money by means of false pretences. Not large sums, but still, half-crowns, and so on. He had given out that he was a wizard, and that he was able and willing to consider the fortunes of his clients. The case created a large amount of local interest, for some curious stories were told about the map in the town. Mankell was a tall, slight, wiry-looking fellow in the prime of life, with coal-black hair and olive complexion—apparently of peasant origin. His bearing was something courtly, even, yet with something in his air which might have led one to suppose that he saw—what others did not—the humor of the thing. At one point his grave, almost saturnine visage distinctly relaxed into a smile. It was when Colonel Gregory, the Chairman of the Court, was passing sentence. After commencing him for three months' hard labor, the Colonel added: "During your stay within the walls of a prison you will have a surprising opportunity of trying your reputation. You say you are a magician. During your stay in jail I would strongly advise you to try it. You claim to make good exercises of them. I need scarcely point out to you how excellent a chance you will have of creating a sensation."

The people laughed. When the great Panhardram is even dimly suspected of an intention to be funny the people always do. But on this occasion even the prisoner understood the sarcasm of the remark. As a rule, it is the prisoner who sees the joke the least of all. Later in the day the prisoner was conveyed to the county jail, where he occupied a journey by rail, with a change upon the way. At the station where they changed there was a delay of 20 minutes. This was the first time that the prisoner had been improved by adjourning to a public house hard by. Here they had a glass—indeed they had two—and when they had finished the waiter handed them a picture of the majesty and might of the law. The waiter shook him by the shoulder. "Here, come—wake up. You're a pretty sort," he said. The constable's reply, although slightly inarticulate, was sufficiently distinct. "Not another drop! Not another drop!" he murmured. "I shouldn't think so," said the waiter. "You have had a palful, it seems to me already."

The man seemed a little puzzled. He turned and looked at Mankell. "Three months' hard labor," he said. "The man looked down and saw that the brewer had given upon his wrist. He was a stout, black-belted man, with another warder. The two returned together. This second official took in the situation at a glance. "You come from—?" naming the town from which they had in fact come. Mankell inclined his head. This second official turned his attention to the prostrate constable. Look in his pockets. The order for committal was produced. "Are you Oliver Mankell?" Again Mankell inclined his head. With the order in his hand the man turned and, with a heavy sigh, went through which he had himself appeared. So Oliver Mankell was the inmate of a cell. He spent that night in the reception cells at the jail. In the morning he had a bath, was inducted into prison clothing, and examined by the doctor. He was then taken back to the main building of the prison, and introduced to the governor. The governor was a quiet, gentlemanly man, with a magnificent black beard, and a pair of spectacles official to the tips of his fingers. As Mankell happened to be the only fresh arrival, the governor favored him with a little conversation. "You've placed yourself in an unbecomingly position, Mankell. I hope you'll obey the rules while you're here."

"I intend to set upon the advice tendered me by the janitor," Mankell said. "The governor looked up. Not only was the voice a musical voice, but the words were not the sort of words generally chosen by the average prisoner. "What advice was that?" "I mean to set upon the advice tendered me by the janitor," Mankell said. "The governor looked up. Not only was the voice a musical voice, but the words were not the sort of words generally chosen by the average prisoner. "What advice was that?" "I mean to set upon the advice tendered me by the janitor," Mankell said.

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In his turn he tried every lock in the jail. This was not the work of a minute or two. The prison contained some 300 night cells. To visit them all necessitated not only a good deal of running up and down stairs, but a good deal of actual walking; for they were not only in different floors and in different blocks, but the prison itself was divided into an entirely separate division—north and south—and to pass from one division to the other entailed a walk of at least 100 yards. By the time he had completed the round of the cells, Mr. Mankell had had about enough of it. It was not surprising that he felt a little bewildered—not one of the locks had shown any more readiness to yield to him than the others.

In passing from one ward to the other, he had passed the row of day cells in which was situated B. 27. Here they found Oliver Mankell sitting in silent days awaiting the call to work. The governor pulled up at sight of him. "Well, Mankell, so there was nothing the matter with the lock of your door?" "I suppose you know nothing about the locks of the other doors?" "Again I don't know anything about the matter," Mankell replied. "The matter seemed to be habitually chary of speech. "What's the matter with you? Are you dumb? Can't you speak when you're spoken to?"

This time Mankell extended the palms of his hands with a gesture which might mean anything or nothing. The governor passed the night cell, and he held a consultation with the chief warder. "Have you any suspicions?" "I've none," Mr. Murray stroked his beard. "It's queer," Mr. Murray stroked his beard. "It's very queer that that man Mankell's should be the only cell in the prison left unopened."

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The governor smiled, but he made no comment on the Major's observation. It was arranged that an inquiry should be made by the chief warder. During chapel a fresh subject was added to the list of those which already called for prompt inquiry.

Probably there is no more delicate and difficult position than that of a prison chaplain. It is a man's duty to be an official upholder of the law; the other toward the defiers of authority—he is the criminal's best friend. It requires the wisest of men to do this, and he must do it with a smile. He must please both sides—or fail. As has already been hinted, Mr. Hewitt, the chaplain of Canterstone jail, was not the wisest man in the county. He was a man of no uncommon position of being disliked by both the rival houses. He meant well, but he was not an apt interpreter of his own mind. He was a man of no uncommon position of being disliked by both the rival houses. He meant well, but he was not an apt interpreter of his own mind.

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I set eyes upon the man I knew there was something about him I couldn't quite make out. He did it all. Have you heard him, how he came to me?" "Pretend!" Mankell laughed. He stretched out his hands in front of him with what seemed to be his favorite gesture, and laughed—in the face of the authorities. "Suppose you give us an example of your power!"

"The suggestion came from the doctor. The Major exploded. "Don't talk stuff and nonsense! Give the man three days' bread and water. That is what he wants."

"You do not believe in magic, then?" Mankell turned to the Major with his laughing eyes. "What's it matter to you what I believe? You may take my word for it that I don't believe in impudent mountebanks like you."

"I should blooming well like to know what this means! 'Ere have I been in this 'ere jail 12 years, and I've never been accused before of letting men out of their cells. He looked each man in turn steadily in the face. "I don't know nothing about that, but I do know that the same hand that played that trick with the same hand that played the trick with the cells, will play the trick with the men."

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