

**THE PRISON OPENED, AND
THE CAPTIVE LOOSED; OR,
THE LIFE OF A THIEF AS SEEN
IN THE DEATH OF A PENITENT**

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The prison opened, and the captive loosed; or, The life of a thief as seen in the death of a penitent
by Josiah Viney

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JOSIAH VINEY

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BY

JOSIAH VINEY:

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PREFACE.

THE following brief Memoir is published at the earnest request of a dying man. The circumstances which have led to its publication are the following:—

Some months since, during my absence from home in search of health, one of the visitors connected with my Christian Instruction Auxiliary became much interested in the case of a young man rapidly sinking in consumption, and visited him frequently. In conversing with him, she found he had been a vicious and violent character, but was sincerely penitent. After several interviews, he expressed an earnest desire to be instrumental in reclaiming some of his former associates; and for this purpose was most anxious to convey to them a written account of the change in his views, and of the sense he had on his deathbed of the enormity and wretchedness of his past life. At his urgent solicitation, a narrative of his life was commenced—he dictating, she being his amanuensis. The record became deeply interesting to both; it swelled into a considerable manuscript,

its details being very minute. Much of it was found unsuitable for publication; but in fulfilment of a promise to the dying penitent, a portion of it appears in the following pages. Many particulars which it was deemed inexpedient to publish in detail, I have embodied in general terms in the remarks with which the narrative is interspersed. It is commended to public attention with an earnest desire that it may secure the object designed; under a deep conviction of the inestimable value of domiciliary visitation, without which such a case as this had never been brought to light; and with humble prayer that He who "chooseth the weak things of the world to confound the mighty" may render it the means of promoting his own glory, by blessing it to the conversion and reformation of some who are yet "ignorant and out of the way."

J. V.

THE PRISON OPENED,
AND
THE CAPTIVE LOOSED.

DID you, dear reader, ever stand by the sea-shore and watch a piece of sea-weed, or a chip of wood, or a polypus, tossed by the billows and driven by the tide? If you have, you perchance noticed how varied and uncertain were its movements, with what force it was dashed hither and thither, and how completely it was at the mercy of the waves: you have seen it now on the surface, now engulfed; at one moment carried far out to sea, the next rolled back by the advancing tide; here caught by an eddy, there drifted by a current; ever restless, ever in motion, always agitated, never at rest. You have perhaps become interested in watching its destiny, and, though a worthless object, you have followed it in its movements with a passing regard. At last you have seen it landed—a sudden wave brought it to shore. It lay at rest on the

beach; and as you took it up to ascertain its nature, and found it to be the marine substance I have imagined, you perhaps thought—"If this thing were endowed with consciousness, had reason, and could think, what a wretched mode of existence it would feel this to be—without aim, useless, in constant turmoil, the sport of every wave, without beauty, destitute of attraction, belonging to neither of the great departments of the animal creation, recognized by none, injurious to many, shunned by all—who would be such a creature as this?" and as you have tossed it again into the ocean, you have, or perhaps you have *not*, felt thankful that you were not a polypus, and that, whatever your condition, at least it was better than *that*. In such circumstances as these, or at any other time, did it ever occur to you that there is a *sea of life*, that there are billows of time, that waves of circumstance exist as well as waves of water—that on this sea, too, and tossed by these billows, are not things, but *beings*—not chips and weeds and polypi, but living men and women—not inanimate creatures and existences born only to die, but immortal souls, beings that will never cease to live? Did you ever notice further, that while some of these pass over the billows in a stately and dignified manner, each in his own bark, beneath his own banner, amid his own music, and surrounded by his own friends; a great multitude are just tossed to and fro on "the troubled sea," and seem but "mire and dirt"—that yet those, like-

wise, are drifting to eternity, to that great ocean into which our little sea is continually pouring—an ocean to many, alas! not *pacific*: and if so, did you not feel that the condition of such is most fearful and demands attention. Were you not disposed to ask, "Can nothing be done for them? Must these creatures, wretched yet imperishable, toss about and dash against the rocks, and drift to and fro, for ever? Can no hand save them, no net receive them? Must this troubled sea 'continually' cast them up? Cannot the sea itself be purified, society and life be improved, and be made to yield only healthy influences instead of those which are noxious and putrid?" Ah, can it not? As the case is at present, this sea, instead of diffusing health, conveys pestilence and disease. It is strewn too with wrecks, the wrecks of fallen humanity, and these in the most shattered condition. God only knows, time only can reveal, but Christians ought to consider, how these wrecks can be collected, and this sea made clear and pure; how the billows of life over which we are all passing to eternity can be made, to the multitude as well as to the few, a pathway to heaven instead of the road to hell.

It is to trace the history of *one* of these portions of wreck, the following narrative is written. It contains a simple account of the life and death of one who for years was tossed about both by circumstance and sin, but who found rest at last. It has little claim to originality, for the most painful

feature of it is, that it is so common. It is not, however, destitute of interest. It depicts in graphic outline the career of vice and crime; it gives an insight into prison life; and while it shows what sin has done, it proves what the grace of God can do.

D—— was born in London, of poor but industrious parents. When but nine years of age, he lost his mother, who appears to have taken a peculiar interest in him, and who on her deathbed commended him with great earnestness to the special care of his father. The immediate causes leading him into that vicious career which he at last so bitterly lamented were twofold—the encouragement of a neighbour, and the influence of a stepmother. On one occasion, when relief-tickets were distributed to the poor in the neighbourhood in which he lived, he was induced to purloin some from his father, at whose shop they were presented, and to carry them to a neighbour, who dishonestly employed them a second time, and agreed to give him sixpence each for them; so that when, some years after, a stepmother was introduced into the family, and acted so unkindly to the orphan children as to induce them to leave home, D—— was already initiated in the art of deception, and was an easy prey to those associates whom he met in the streets. Here, as might be expected, he soon fell into temptation. “My son,” says Solomon, “if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.” Had