

**SEVENTEEN YEARS
IN THE
UNDERWORLD**

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Seventeen Years in the Underworld by Wellington Scott

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WELLINGTON SCOTT

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BY
WELLINGTON SCOTT

INTRODUCTION BY
LYNN HAROLD HOUGH



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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
	INTRODUCTION	5
I	EARLY LIFE	11
II	BEGINNING A CAREER	16
III	PERSISTING IN MISDEEDS	21
IV	EFFECTS OF GAMBLING	27
V	THE REFORM SCHOOL	30
VI	ESCAPE AND RECAPTURE	36
VII	DISCIPLINE	41
VIII	LIFE IN PRISON	47
IX	PRISON EXPERIENCES	49
X	CRIMINAL CLASSES	57
XI	SOME TYPES OF CROOKS	61
XII	MORALS IN THE UNDERWORLD	66
XIII	SYSTEMATIC LAWLESSNESS	69
XIV	BETRAYAL AND ARREST	74
XV	PECULIARITIES OF "YEGGS"	79
XVI	CONCERNING PRISON MANAGEMENT	83
XVII	MISTAKES OF A CHAPLAIN	86
XVIII	CONTRACT LABOR	89
XIX	PARDONED	99
XX	DIFFICULTIES OF THE EX-PRISONER	104
XXI	REFORMATION	109
XXII	COMPARISONS	112
XXIII	A PLEA FOR DISCHARGED PRISONERS	117

INTRODUCTION

THE two of us were sitting in a large park in an Eastern city, one beautiful summer evening. As the rich afterglow of the sunset turned to twilight and then to dark, my friend began to talk about the old furtive days in the underworld. He told me how in many an American city he had stood before some house of an evening when the shades were not drawn. Within he would see the father and the mother, and the happy little children, and all the bright light of home. He would turn away abruptly and walk into the dark, trying to forget it. He could never have a home like that.

Somehow there flashed upon me that night such an intimate sense of the tragic loneliness which a man can know in the underworld as I had never felt before.

Two years later I stood in the home of this same friend who for so many years had

been a social outlaw. He had fought his battle and won. He was happily married, and his wife and he together were meeting life with quiet strength and courage. A little girl had come to them. I held this tiny baby in my arms as I pronounced the great old words, "I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." A great light was in the eyes of the father, and the mother's eyes shone with the same gladness. The furtive man who had walked away in the dark trying to forget the sight of a happy home was replaced by a strong, capable citizen, a proud father, in a happy home.

I first met this friend of mine—Wellington Scott he calls himself in this narrative—in a certain State penitentiary. It was in the old days when stripes were still in evidence, and with the prison pallor on his face, and clad in the uniform of the institution, there was no mistaking the fact that he was under sentence. But even then there was something incongruous about it all. The powerfully built frame did suggest deeds which

required strength and daring, but the face, ready to light up with friendliness and kindly humor, the eyes ready to brighten with hearty good comradeship, the whole bearing, despite a certain embarrassment at meeting a stranger at that place and under those conditions, suggested a man who might make a great deal of life, and who might mean much to his friends. As an old pal of his in the underworld said to me at a later time, "It never seemed that Wellington Scott belonged there."

It did not take us long to become friends. We looked each other in the eye. There were a few words of straight, honest talk, and we had found each other. After that day I kept in close touch with him.

I watched his fight for a straight life when he came from the institution where he was confined. I came to know him with an increasing understanding. He had hard things to meet. He felt the tug of the undertow of the old life. But he held to his new purpose.

His unusual powers of observation, his

capacity for thought, and his gift of expression made the following narrative of absorbing interest. The reader will come to have a new understanding of the forces which drag boys down, and of the underworld which waits for them with wide-open doors. He will understand better how to deal with the boys in his own home, his own Sunday school, and his own community, when he has read this revealing document. The whole problem of the prison and prison reform will appear in a new light. And the reader will come to think of the prisoner, not as a wastrel, but as a man who has lost his way.

The iron entered into the soul of the man who wrote this little book, and sometimes the intensity of his feeling is felt in his writing. Do some of his terrible memories make him "see red," and ought some of his vigorous statements to be taken with a grain of salt? I do not think that those familiar with prison conditions under the old regime will be inclined to that opinion. Donald Lowrie's *My Life in Prison* may well be