

But the Rain Ceases Not

*A Human Interest Story From the Pen of a
Comrade Suffering for His Economic Beliefs.*

By
LINN A. E. GALE.

SUNDAY afternoon in a military prison. Outside a drenching rain pours violently down. Gutters are flooded with sudden streams that send dust and pebbles scurrying away out of sight. Sidewalks that were a few moments before shabby and dirty are wet and shiny from the vigorous cleansing. Disgruntled pedestrians, concerned about their own comfort rather than city sanitation and natural processes, scamper here and there, anywhere to get away from the beneficent water and the probably less beneficent effect of the soaking that would result if they remained out long in the shower.

Outside is the great, free out-of-doors where the race of men goes by and people regard not freedom, for they have it and know not what it is to lose it.

Inside are steel-barred cells enclosing human beings, some accused, some convicted, of breaking human laws, and all of them keenly conscious of the absence of that liberty which others have and consider so carelessly.

Dinner has been eaten. The prisoners are back in their cells for Sunday is not a work day. Two are in single cells, each with a small table, books and writing materials, in addition to the invariable cot. Some 100 more are bunched together in three large cells with about thirty prisoners in each.

The sentry paces slowly, monotonously, around the cages, wishing his two-hour shift were over. Or maybe he wishes somebody would start something by way of variety.

Outside the drenching rain pours steadily down.....

Inside varied egos, employed at varied devices, working out varied destinies, but locked securely away from the same unconfined air and the same May shower, sing and whistle, laugh and jabber, read and write, and even, sometimes, think.....

In the cell of the writer and idealist all is silent save the steady scratch of his pen.

In the cell of the army officer there is no sound but the occasional turning of a leaf of a fascinating novel.

In the big cells men and youths sprawling, lying or sitting on their bunks, send out a surprising series of all kinds of noises.

Sadness and silliness, pathos and bathos, repentance and resentment, optimism, despair and defiance, mingle in that bedlam of contrasting voices. Strange thing, the human throat, which can produce so many tones. Strange things, human beings from whom these tones emanate.

"What the hell do we care? O what the hell do we care?" sings a happy-go-lucky, ad-

venturesome youth who has seen prison walls more than once before and knows that the awaited sentence for his latest offense will be no light one.

"Back to the jail yard and we're never coming back" comes from a group of several whose musical talents might earn them good salaries if employed in certain prosperous amusement places.

A wistful-looking boyish chap hums "Tipperary" plaintively, unmindful of the noisy group near him.

A cool, nervy, devil-may-care type, one of the kind that never gets phased, never says quit, and often does unexpected deeds, smokes a cigarette nonchalantly and gazes reflectively at the slatted ceiling.

Two or three seated on cots and with pads on their knees, slowly and laboriously write their periodical messages to mothers back home—the sad-eyed mothers who suffered that these boys might be born, who suffered that they might grow to manhood, and who today suffer most of all because their sons are where they are.

Four or five squatted together on two beds tell jokes, ribald and otherwise, and cuss and damn with accomplished fluency, while another group indulges in mild horse-play, tells everybody to go to hell, and makes a pretense at deep depravity. An outsider witnessing the scene for the first time would think he had found a den of desperados accustomed to wildest crimes. An occupant of the prison, knowing the place and the men, sees only grown-up boys of different degrees of immaturity and unwisdom, trying to dispel their own ennui in boisterous, grotesque and vulgar ways.

One whose good-nature is incurable and whose entertaining inclinations keep many another from worry and the blues, recites steadily one crazy thing after another with unfailing persistence and untiring tongue. Everything from Lord Byron's poems to the latest semi-smutty joke of "Whiz Bang" and the newest vaudeville smart sayings comes from this indefatigable youngster, between puffs at a diminishing white paper cone.

Outside the drenching rain keeps on pouring down.....

Prisoners may sing, swear, pray, read, write and think, but the rain goes on, if not forever, at least for a goodly time. Nature is washing the modern city outside and the fields and plains beyond.

The rain ceases not.....

How like life itself, this tiny scene in the vast kaleidoscope of a huge mystifying appalling world.

Babble, chatter and gurgle men may, but the great eternal processes cease not nor even pause. Neither banter nor profanity nor anything else bothers the busy rain, intent on its duty of purging the ground and purifying the air.

Time is exasperating, annoying, irritating, to most people, especially to us Americans who live in nervous impatience always. We must have something to do. We cannot keep still. To spend hours in meditation as does the Oriental, would drive us into insanity, or all but a few of us. A small number can concentrate for long spells but the average American must busy himself at something, be it politics, stock gambling, reading the news, smoking, chewing, telling stories or manicuring the finger nails. We are a race of devotees of action, always

doing, doing, doing. Delays, waiting, lack of occupation, the existence of time on our hands, these things vex and tantalize us.

We want to get rid of time as quickly as we can, to use it up as fast as possible. Those who are out of prison work with all their might when they work, and play with all their might when they play. Thus they keep time from dragging. They save themselves from boredom. Those who are in prison usually have to work, and this is well. But they just as eagerly play with all their might or do something else with all their might, when there is no work to do. And this is well. If they did not sing and swear, pray and read and write, they would think and then worry, and finally lose their sanity. Or they would seek to deaden their thoughts and fears with perversions and drugs which would soon wreck them.

This pandemonium of talking, fooling, stunts and capers is, then, worth while in the economy of things. It is better that these men thus amuse themselves, thus pass the time away, than that they practice sodomy as one did or sit for hours and hours in morbid, moody, suicidal silence, as does another.

Is it not all a simile of human life? Is not the military prison like this curious stay of a few score years on the earth?

As in the cells, so in the world in general, men spend their time in diverse manners. In wisdom and in folly, in seriousness and in frolic, in faith and in doubt, in reason and in superstition, in hope and in cynicism, they live their lives.

Some accept in supine helplessness and some in raging bitterness the lot that is theirs. Some are non-resistant doormats and some are hot chimneys from which come the sparks—their fuming curses.

Others with clearer sight and better heads avoid both the torpor of apathy and the wasting fever of anger, and settle down to steady, serene preparation for their own liberation.

Our world is like the military prison. We are like the prisoners.

Despite the turbulence and confusion, a few of us, indifferent alike to frivolity, oaths and vulgarity, plan and work and look forward to the hour when we shall have freedom and happiness.

The multitude endeavors only to forget the disagreeable present. It as yet neither wants to know the reason for being where it is nor the way to larger liberty.

Outside, the rain ceases not. In spite of the erring creatures within, Nature perseveres. The shower that heeds them not purifies their atmosphere. They breathe into their lungs fresher oxygen, but do not know the cause.

We struggle, blunder, fail, achieve, smile, sneer and weep in the prison cells of our differing lives.

Outside is a greater, richer, grander world than we have yet known.

Supreme, serene, unworried, the Cosmic Urge carries on its task.

Gloomy though the surroundings, repellent though the environs, they will some day be better.

Regardless of ourselves there are forces that are transforming these surroundings, these environs.

Outside of these cells of our individual existences the rain ceases not.....

It is the rain of the Mighty Cleansing in a Universe of Eternal Progress.