

THE MISCARRIAGE OF JUSTICE IN STAFFORDSHIRE.

Statement by Johnson.

The two farmers, Clowes and Johnson, who were wrongfully convicted in connection with what is known at the time as the "Rushton outrage" were liberated from Millbank Penitentiary on Friday evening, and at once proceeded to their respective homes. Johnson was seen at his house, near Rudyard, which is distant seven miles from where Clowes lives, at a place called Biddalfall, their former residences having received new tenants since their incarceration. The household of Clowes was sold up, and his wife and eight children have been in receipt of 6s. a week from the parish. The Half Way House, formerly occupied by Johnson, is in other hands, the unfortunate man having lost his all, and now, at the age of 41, has to begin the world again. During his imprisonment, the wife, having only a grandson to maintain, has made headway against adversity, and it is with no little pride that she is able to receive her husband in a home, though it may be humbler than their former one. It is but a small house built of stone in the centre of a field, bordering on the village of Hoxton. Johnson was standing at the gateway of his residence among some friends. He was easily discerned in the crowd on account of his close-cropped head and shaved face. He wore a felt hat, a blue overcoat, and suit of grey, and was smoking his pipe. Without exaggeration he may be described as

pipe. Without exaggeration he may be described as good looking, with an intelligent face, and well shaped head. When he was sent to prison he was erect and wore a fine beard, without a sign of advancing age. Now he is grey and grizzled. His shoulders are bent, and his general appearance is that of a man over sixty. While he stood there gossiping with his friends his brother and sister arrived from Manchester. The meeting was an affecting one, no words being spoken for a time. Johnson, evidently overcome, hastily retreated into his dwelling. He stated in the course of the interview that on Saturday morning he passed old neighbours, whom he bowed to, but they did not recognise him. An old and intimate relation, a Mr. Corbishley, who is the brother-in-law of Johnson, had been speaking to him for some time before being aware of the fact, so altered is he. Clowes is not so much changed in appearance, though of course he is shorn of all his hair. He had been in the infirmary for the past five or six weeks suffering from a gathered foot, which he had hurt while working among the convicts at Chatham.

Johnson's story is substantially as follows:—He said he would not talk about the crime, because he could not, having been wrongfully accused, wrongfully imprisoned, and justly liberated. The charge, he said, came upon him as a thunderclap. He was overwhelmed, and could not look after his business as he ought to have done. The doctor called upon him on the Thursday before he went to Stafford to be tried. He asked me "What about Brooks? He must be a queer fellow," and I replied 'He must.' "I was unable to talk about the matter. I was so possessed with the horror of the charge that I had not the heart or readiness to question the doctor, or ask his advice. Of course I knew he had called upon me for the purpose of hearing what I had to say about Brooks. 'I daresay you know quite as

to say about Brooks. 'I daresay you know quite as much as I can tell you,' I said." "I was never in his company in my life, any further than meeting him on rent day. Some people call him a contractor. I never knew him to have a contract in my life. I have suffered heavy losses by my imprisonment. An entire horse, which was valued at £200, died just before a bargain was concluded to sell it for £150, and there being no one to look after the affairs on the farm as I could have done myself, things went all wrong. I have practically now to start the world afresh. Of course, I knew nothing about these things until I got home. I sometimes got letters, and my wife came to see me three times during my imprisonment. I know that they call my house Shoolcroft, but that is all I know. The rooms are filled with friends, who have come to see me. I was about fourteen stones weight when I went into prison, I was always counted a strong, healthy man. I have not had a doctor for one-and-twenty years. I was at Stafford a month, and had to work the treadmill three weeks, and pick oakum. I was twenty minutes on the treadmill and ten off. It was very hard labour to me, as I was then a fleshy man, and it was awkward too, for I would miss my footing and receive a severe scraping blow on the shins, which were barked. I was never round found fault with either at Stafford, or at the other prisons to which I was subsequently taken. Indeed, I must say that for a man who has committed a great crime the punishment is not too hard, but for a man who is innocent it is very dreadful and degrading. It was my endeavour always to do what I could to obey the rules and to avoid punishment. I was never whipped, but I have frequently heard the screams of men who I suppose were being flogged. At Stafford I also had a spell at the crank which is used in pumping water to serve the purposes of the gaol. Clowes, while at Stafford, was employed at picking oakum. From Stafford myself and five others, including Clowes, were taken

ford myself and five others, including Clowes, were taken in charge of a warder by train to Pentonville, where the Stafford suit was taken off, and I was clad in an ordinary convict's suit, woollen trousers, coat, and waistcoat, and a thick flannel or felt cap. I was at once taken to a cell, where I underwent solitary confinement. In the summer time at Pentonville I rose at five o'clock in the morning, like the other convicts. It is the same through all the prisons—five in the summer and a little later in the winter, the time varying according to the length of the days. I swept my cell and wrapped up my bedclothes. The bed was a mattress of coarse cloth, stuffed with oakum, and I had a thick blanket. I was warm enough at Pentonville. At Stafford I had to sleep on the bare boards. We had breakfast every day at a quarter to eight. On the Monday we got for dinner a four ounce loaf, three-quarters of a pound of potatoes, and three ounces of beef. On the Tuesday we got for dinner a pint of soup, four ounces of beef, three-quarters of a pound of potatoes; on the Wednesday mutton instead of beef, the same quantity, and with the same accompaniment of bread and potatoes. On Thursday we got potatoes, bread, and pudding. That is, plain pudding or dumpling. Friday was the same as Tuesday, and Saturday the same as Monday. Breakfast was the same every day. On Sunday there was a difference in the dinner. I was allowed 4 ounces of cheese and an 11 ounce loaf for dinner. There was no tea. I had supper every night. It consisted of three parts of a pint of cocoa and a 7 ounce loaf. After I had cleaned my cell I did tailoring. I made bags for letters. I mean mail bags. I was about 20 when I was married, and I used to be a farm servant, and I then mended my own clothes and my own shoes, so you will see. I was a bit of a shoemaker, and a bit of a tailor. I did not know then how I was to be employed in my old age. I worked in the cell, but I was in despair the whole time, and it was thought the confinement would kill me in a few months. You see, I had

would kill me in a few months. You see, I had been used to the open air of the hill, and to an independent and respected life, and when I looked forward to ten years and recollected that I was then in advanced years, I felt that I had nothing much to live for. Often, at first in the night and in the dark solitude of my cell, I have sobbed like a child. It was a despairing time, but I endeavoured to bear up and to make my bitter lot as pleasant as possible. The warders on the rounds peeped through the cell-wicket which they alone can open, but I was not allowed to speak. It is silent and solitary confinement at Pentonville. The exercise was at different times of the day. All the convicts walked in the ring, which is in a flagged space. Even there there was no opportunity of speaking to anyone. To be caught whispering was to run the risk of punishment. I see it has been stated in the newspapers that one of us picked up a scrap of newspaper which was secreted, and read by the convicts. It is a falsehood. I never told anybody anything of the kind. Indeed, I have purposely abstained from speaking to anyone until I had seen Mr. Harrison, to whom the confession was made, and to others who have interested themselves in my case. After exercise I returned to the tailoring, and retired to bed every night at a quarter to eight, and at a quarter to seven on Sunday nights. Clowes was downhearted, I could see. Did I never speak to him in a whisper? Well (laughing), we were not allowed to talk in prison. The solitary confinement had the effect of injuring my sight, and the prison authorities provided me with a pair of spectacles. Since coming out I have been compelled to borrow a pair from the landlady of the Crown Inn, where we are now sitting. On Sundays I had nothing to do but sweep my cell, to attend exercise, and to go to chapel twice a day, forenoon and afternoon. I was five months at Pentonville, and then I went to Millbank. I liked Millbank best of all the gaols. There solitary confine-

After I had undergone nine months of solitary confinement my allowance to breakfast was increased to an 11oz. loaf with a pint of gruel, that being 3 oz. more. The other meals were as before stated. At Millbank I was mostly engaged in making bags to carry coals in about London. On December 4th, 1881, I was removed from Millbank to Chatham, where I remained till I was set free. The work was very hard there. We laboured in gangs at dock works, on what is called "the island." Clowes came to Chatham about a week after me. He was employed in making cement and chopping wood for prison fires during the year. So was I during the first three months, but after that my task was barrow wheeling.

When the glad news of my release came it overpowered me, not with joy, for I was in a sort of stupor at the, to me, stupendous tidings. Clowes was overcome too, and he hardly yet realises, I believe, that he

When the glad news of my release came it overpowered me, not with joy, for I was in a sort of stupor at the, to me, stupendous tidings. Clowes was overcome too, and he hardly yet realises, I believe, that he is a free man. We were brought to Millbank last Friday morning, having been each provided with a suit of clothes at Chatham. The Governor and a director received us, and treated us like gentlemen. We never can be treated better. They gave us a breakfast (not gruel and eleven ounces of bread), but a mutton chop, sir, and tea or coffee, whichever we liked. They observed our clothes, and said, "You can't go home in those," so we each got a new suit, and afterwards we had a good dinner. I had another mutton chop, fearing to indulge too eagerly at first. We were each given £6 and sent home. I was asked to look after Clowes, who, under the gladdening effect of his release, was unable to pull himself together. We reached Burslem on Friday night. It was too late to get on home that night, and we stayed at the Cross Keys in that town. On Saturday morning I drove home, while Clowes went home by train. I can hardly yet realise my position. I eat very little.

The two men were received with great enthusiasm by their friends and the public.

Nottingham Evening Post
Jan 16 1882