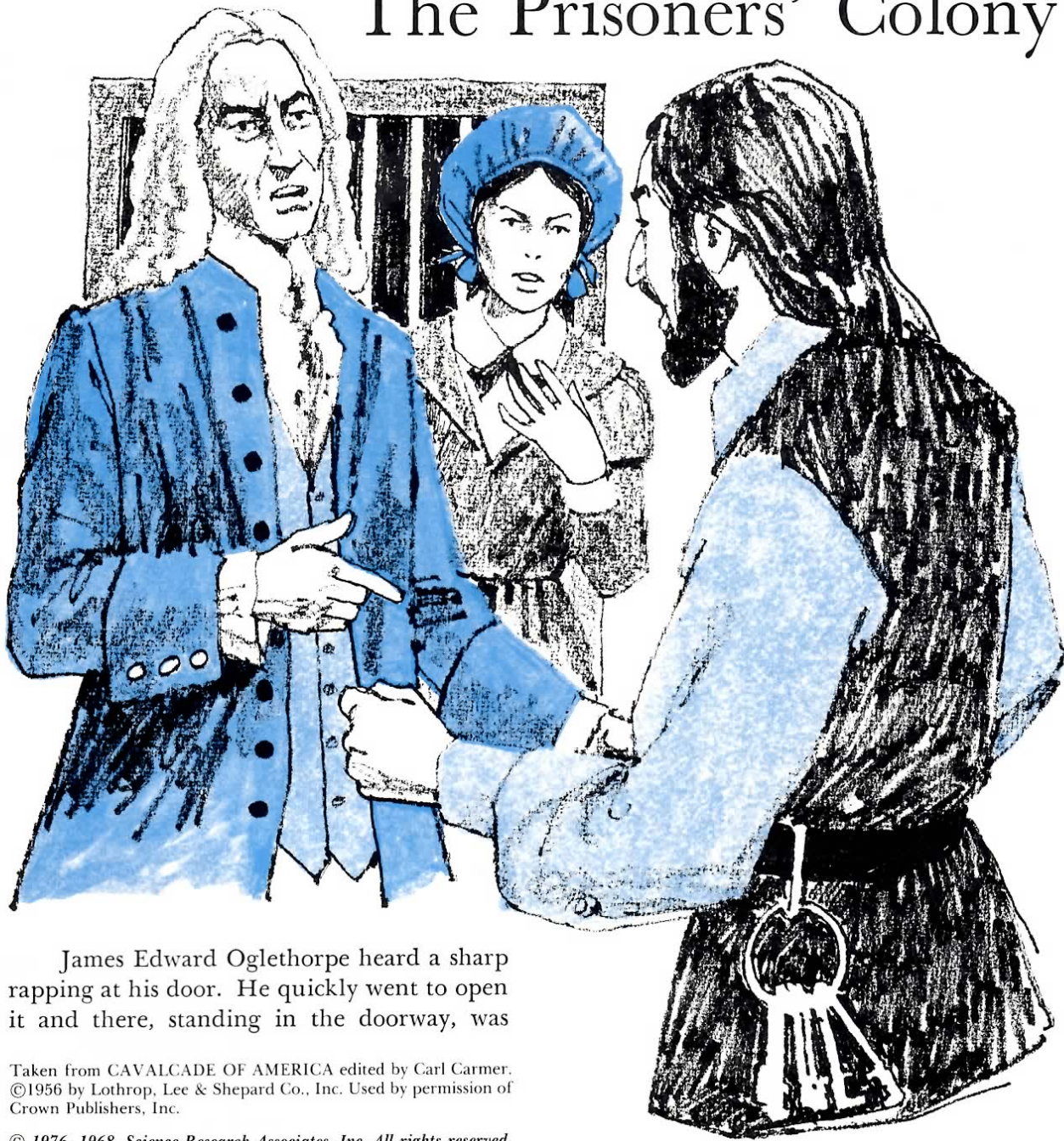


The Prisoners' Colony



James Edward Oglethorpe heard a sharp rapping at his door. He quickly went to open it and there, standing in the doorway, was

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the wife of one of his closest friends, Anne Castell. She looked as if she were about to burst into tears.

Oglethorpe ushered her into the parlor and had his maid bring in some tea. Then he tried to calm Anne down. She was overwrought because her husband, Robert, a promising young architect, had fallen into debt and been thrown into prison. In eighteenth century England you were put behind bars if you couldn't pay your bills.

"I'm not sure whether he's alive or dead," Anne cried. "And the warden won't let me in to see him. Please, James—you're a member of Parliament—can't you help me get into the prison to see Bob? I want to take him a little money."

In those days if a prisoner—even in debtors prison—wanted to be treated well, he had to pay off the warden. If the warden didn't get his money, the prisoner was not only badly treated, but sometimes tortured.

For example, just before James Oglethorpe and Anne Castell appeared for admission to debtors prison, Warden Bambridge had been instructing a guard in the technique of putting the screws on a debtor. The victim was a man named Isaac Delaney. He was in jail for concealing assets to the sum of thirty-five pounds, ten shillings, and six pence.

"Either you'll pay your creditors or you'll pay me," said the warden as he gave the screw another turn.

Delaney was being dragged off in chains when Oglethorpe and Anne were announced.

"You say she's Robert Castell's wife?" said the warden to Oglethorpe. "Well, she can't see him. And neither can you."

"Perhaps, Warden, you aren't aware that I am a member of Parliament," said Oglethorpe. "I demand an interview with your prisoner."

"Well, now, Mr. Oglethorpe, if you put it that way . . ." said the warden. Then he added slyly, "But I'd advise you not to see him; I'd really advise you *not* to see him!"

The warden held a lantern for Oglethorpe and Anne as they walked down into the depths of the prison. Finally they came to Castell's cell. He was lying on the floor, chained to another prisoner.

"Don't touch me, Anne!" he cried. As he looked up, even in the low light of the lantern, his wife could see that he had smallpox.

"Why haven't you taken this man out of this hole and to a physician?" asked Oglethorpe.

"But that takes money!" exclaimed the warden sharply.

"Even if I had the money I wouldn't give Warden Bambridge a farthing!" said Castell.

"You see," said the warden, "your friend Mr. Castell is one of the difficult ones."

"I'll do what I can, Bob, to get you out," said Oglethorpe. "And as for you, Warden Bambridge, I'll see that you are brought to justice. I'll see that this whole business somehow gets the light of day in Parliament."

In his seven years as a member of the House of Lords, James Oglethorpe had made only one speech. What time he did devote to Parliament was spent on two obscure committees. One of these committees was concerned with the improvement of roads; the

other took care of the needs of fishermen, shoemakers, and dockworkers.

But this visit to the London debtors prison was the turning point in Oglethorpe's life. He became a new man. He now had a cause to fight for. And fight he did. He buttonholed the individual members of Parliament and described to each the unspeakable conditions in the debtors jail. He gave a grisly account of what he had seen. He made speeches before the entire body and told of the corrupt Warden Bambridge. He told of the cruel methods of torture. And needless to say, he created quite an uproar.

Then, when all the members of Parliament were up in arms over these unspeakable conditions, Oglethorpe came up with a solu-

tion. He suggested that prisoners like Robert Castell, debtors who became so through no fault of their own, but who were undone by guardians, or lawsuits, or accidents of commerce, be sent to America to settle a new colony.

Three years later, Oglethorpe's suggestion was acted upon. King George II granted him a charter to establish a new colony.

The charter came too late for Robert Castell. He died a few days after Oglethorpe went to see him. But for hundreds of other debtor prisoners, it meant a new life—a life as pioneers in a new country.

On April 21, 1732, James Oglethorpe and a boatload of prisoners sailed for America, where they founded the colony of Georgia.

CHECK YOUR READING

1. Anne Castell was the wife of one of James Oglethorpe's
 - A worst enemies
 - B closest friends
 - C new clients

2. Anne's husband had been thrown into prison because he
 - A spoke against the king
 - B had robbed a store
 - C owed someone money

3. Anne thought Oglethorpe could help her get into the prison because he
 - A knew the warden well
 - B was a member of Parliament
 - C had a lot of money

4. In eighteenth century England, if a prisoner wanted to be treated well he had to
 - A know the warden
 - B pay the warden
 - C threaten the warden

5. Putting the screws on a debtor was a method of
 - A torture
 - B trickery
 - C bribery

6. When Anne and Oglethorpe got to Castell's cell, they found him
 - A pacing the floor
 - B shouting through the bars
 - C chained to another prisoner

7. Castell didn't want his wife to touch him because he
 - A had been badly beaten
 - B was ragged and dirty
 - C had a serious sickness

8. Until his visit to the prison, Oglethorpe's conduct in Parliament had been
 - A rather dull and uninspired
 - B too fiery and hotheaded
 - C dishonest and uncaring

9. Robert Castell met his death
 - A in America
 - B in prison
 - C on the sea

10. Oglethorpe founded the colony of
 - A Rhode Island
 - B Maryland
 - C Georgia