

Holloway. Sunday. April 21. 1912.

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My darling Daughters. You will want to hear all about the hunger-strike, while it is fresh in my mind, & I was not allowed to make any allusion to it in my public letter. In the first place let me acknowledge the telegram announcing Margaret's arrival at home, which I got yesterday afternoon. I suppose it would have reached me on Friday, only the authorities were still upset by the occurrences of the few days before. It was also yesterday that I got the blouse which Aunt Keta sent me. Please thank her for it. I particularly admire the broad arrows with which the buttons are sewn on. Well - up till Saturday we had heard nothing about other prisoners, & on that afternoon we had an edition of what we called Guardians - one for each of prisoners, just to look after them, see that they had all they wanted or could have that they were in good health, had books, &c. There were speeches from the meetings, in the bronchos that were contested, & altogether as much fun as we could get out in the exercise yard. Meanwhile the R.C. priest had been to see some of his flock & had told them that Askebury had been striking since Good Friday, & that some of them had been forcibly fed. This, of course, put an abrupt end to our play, & some of those who had friends at Askebury were very much upset, & immediately began to feast secretly, hiding away their food, or throwing it out of windows. The older & wiser ones waited for a lead from outside, & on Monday we got a signal to keep on, ^{trusting} things looked hopeful. So I had my breakfast on Tuesday morning, a bigger one than usual; & after that we all refused our food. The P. came round in the afternoon & dauded my heart. I told him how old I was, & he said I was not so old arterially. I was hoping he wd. have thought me too old & wd. have sent me out. However, he didn't, & really the older ones seem to have borne it better than the young ones. I never felt hungry at all, or in the least craving for food. I only felt very cold, with occasional hot flushes, & latterly rather shaky & trembly, but that was quite as much because we were kept in cells all day on Wed., not allowed out except for a few minutes to the lavatory. On Wednesday morning the Governor said us, & about 6 at a time, an offer from the Home Office of letters once a fortnight, visitor once a month, no food from outside, & this not to apply to hard labour people or those who did not do prison work. We said that was no use, we would go on. On Thursday he came again & said about the 11 lbs of food from outside, so we said we wd. consider it, if we might go out & talk it over. Opinions were divided outside, but most thought we

should close with the offer, provided other prisons did too. Matron, who has been a brick all thro', promised to try to get word from other prisons, & we promised that, if she did, we wd take our dinners. So I allowed a pint of hot milk & egg to be put in my cell, & sat down beside it to wait for the message. On Wednesday afternoon they had already begun to feed some of them, & that evening is simply too awful to be recalled to memory. Here we were, locked up in our cells, helpless, shaky & weak from 36 hours fast, hearing screams & choking struggles from cells close by - You know I am not easily upset, but I was never so near fainting before. I am now collecting statistics about the feeding, which was very injudiciously done, with no antiseptic precautions, & although old prisoners said it was better than in former times, some of it was very cruel. One poor girl told me, "it was not pain, it was agony," & she is not a whiner; even one who did not struggle & said it really did not hurt told me the shock was very great, & left her quite exhausted. About 2 o'clock or so 5 or 6 telegrams came in from one of the outside people, addressed to her special friends here "Stop hungerstrike like Aylesbury." Various people heard this & took their dinner, but no one told me. About 3 the W. came in & looked at my ring, upon wh. I told him I was just waiting for a message & had promised Matron I wd eat as soon as it came. He told me that others had given in, but I did not believe him till he brought Miss Davies to my cell, & she said she quite believed the telegrams. Then I took the food, a wardress bringing me some that was a little warmer than mine, which had got quite cold. The swallowing made the back of the palate & throat very sore for a little while, & in the evening, when I tried to eat a little bread, it was worse still. It is still rather sore, altho' it only looks a very little red. Some one has given me a tiny looking glass in which I can see it. The hot-headed young ones wd not believe the telegrams, said it was very easy to forge telegrams, so Miss Davies telegraphed to the sender, Mrs Hicks asking her to write an autograph letter, giving what details she knew. This came by first post in the morning, & Matron allowed me to take it round to the cells of those still holding out, to show them. But as the letter only said that Mrs Hicks had been told by the Prison Commissioners, Vera Wentworth still declined to believe, & said she wd as soon believe Ananias! We had got out for exercise that day, Friday, twice, so we c^d talk it all over. Those still being fed were not allowed out, in unnecessary cruelty, but

"I must have that to mend my clothes," they said "Yes, but you've got scissors there." I said "I must have scissors to keep my nails tidy," so finally they took only the food & left my other things. From some people they took any little thing of their own they had, a most exasperating way that has been acted upon several times since we came in. I wonder who is responsible for the details of such orders. "Every body is feeling the reaction a little now, & those who used to be jumping & playing ball are now found lying about on rugs on the exercise ground, either in sun or shade, according to feelings. My throat is very sore, altho' better now (after tea). I have been making myself a gargle with Chlorate of potash pearls & cande Cologne which Miss Davis gave me, and some Glycerine etc. I had myself from the B. It is just the effect of the strain, chiefly mental. Miss Davis says when she looked in at me through my key hole on Wed. evening when she was out for a little, just after the feeding & screaming, I looked quite an old woman, she never saw such a change in any one in so short a time. The Matron & wardresses are quite knocked up, & one of them says she has not slept since she was made to hold some one who was being fed. While it was going on, Miss Davis said to Matron "It's devilish," Matron said "It's worse"! I am sure all the wardresses would resign in a body if they dared. We have been agitating for more open windows in Chapel, where, by the way, I have not gone for about a fortnight. Mr. Marshall, who goes out on Tuesday, was very anxious to make a sensation on this last Sunday, so she asked some of us to make paper fans & use them vigorously. I told her I hadn't meant to go at all, but she said "Oh go, & come out, we trust to you to back us up." A good many of us did not go, & some were getting ready to feign faintness, but to their surprise it was real & one after another had to be led out by wardresses. The first was one of the ordinary prisoners, then some of us, & then an attendant wardress came staggering down the aisle, & barely got outside before she flopped. I was just getting ready to feign faint & go out when an elderly lady in front fell right over in a real faint, & I followed her out & insisted on staying with her & coming back to our exercise ground here, where we stayed till dinner time. We hope it may have the result of better ventilation. Matron came down from the elevated feller, which she shares with the Governor, & altho' I think she suspected some of the folks, she said

we spoke to them through the windows, trying in vain to persuade them. But later on Mr. Lauburg came to see Vera, Mr. P.'s can always see prisoners, & he told her all about it, & made her believe that all was over. She came back almost dancing, & demanding food from anyone who had some. Meanwhile, Mrs. Marshall, who had been seeing some one in the hospital, had heard that even there they wanted to strike. Mrs. M. was so very averse to the hunger strike, altho' she loyally joined us when it did take place, that she was rather "suspect" by the keen ones, so a number came & begged me to get Matron to take me over to the hospital to reassure them. So in the middle of writing my letter, after tea on Friday, a holland dressed wardress came to say Matron wanted me, & I went to the hospital, standing apart from the rest of the Prison. I don't think I was ever so welcome anywhere, they were so glad to see me one else in among them, & so glad to hear the strike was over. So felt so good to be doing something for some one - the terrible thing here is - the way in which one has only one's self to think of. The writing of my letter & the visit to the hosp. had the same exciting effect on my mind as a big meeting outside, & I found it difficult to go to sleep at night. They have been very good to us since the strike, feeding us first on fluid food & now trying to give us more variety; & they have been letting us stay longer out at exercise. One of us has asked the D. that we have our "associated labors" out of doors in the exercise yard, & that wd. give us an extra hour or more of fresh air. The spy-hole in my door has had its glass broken by a former inhabitant, so I can swing the cover round so that it sticks against a board outside & stays open, & at night, after the light is put out, I can get my finger through & flick it up. This gives me a slight through current of air, although it is only the size of a half crown. I have gone on with the history of the strike, & now I shall go back to some incidents, & give you an idea of how things come upon us in Holloway. On Wed. night, as I was washing, stripped to the waist, my cell door was suddenly unlocked, & 3 wardresses appeared on the threshold. They did make a slight apology, & hurried outside while I finished drying & put my big coat on, & then they came in. "Are you taking your food?" "Not at present," I said. "Have you any food in your cell?" "Yes," I said "but I don't want it, take it away," so they took a paper bag I had. Then, before I could turn round, they were over all my things, opening bags, sponge bag, brush & comb, dressingippers, looking into everything, turned out my shirt pocket & investigating everything. Questioned my little work-case. I said "I was allowed to have that," "Yes, you were allowed," they said, "but fresh orders have come tonight." I said

that Mrs Casey, with whom I was, was a real one. I am not going back to Chapel, it is really not safe when one is not feeling extra strong. We sit behind the ordinary prisoners & they do not watch us carefully as we do! We hear that after Petros we are not to be allowed to have a bath until the D. says we may. I have not had one since Friday week. It is not very up to date to be afraid of warm water, for of course the wardress in attendance could always see that it was not so hot as to cause faintness.

The parcel with the blouses was brought to me today, & it took me some time to find the little note, alas! I was looking for it. It was excellently well hidden, & I am very glad to hear it. I think a petition might be got up in Liverpool & Birkenhead for the release of all of us, Miss Davies, Miss Palterthorpe, Mrs Ryan & myself. You might suggest it to Mrs Abraham. I am sure a great deal of pressure is being brought to bear on the Home Office. I shall not be sorry to get out, but like you, I would not have missed the experience. = I sat grilling in the sun, with my paper hat over my face, all this afternoon, & it has done my throat a lot of good. It is not usual for me to have a bad throat - it is not cold at all. = I have heaps of blouses now, more than I want, but I do want some knickers, for I only brought one pair with me & I have been wearing them all this time. I wonder if you c. put the leading article of "Votes" into a band of it. If you do, you must crumple it to make it soft fresh. But if you have already sent off the parcel, never mind, for Miss Davies is going to ask her sister to put it into the hem of her nightgown when it comes back from the wash. I do hope the long sentence people will get reduced - there have never been 4 & 6 months sentences before, & think of staying here till the end of August. I think I'll stop for tonight, & go on tomorrow. I am becoming quite stupid; I was trying to learn the part of a witness in a funny little play an American girl has been writing, & I found it quite difficult. = Miss Davies is going to ask her sister to see me as well as her, so I shall not have a visitor of my own.

Monday morning. My throat is better today, spontaneous pain gone, only some swelling left, & soreness on swallowing. I hope it will come right, but it is the sort of throat for which one prescribes the sea-side or mountain air. I wrote to Uncle Sandy last week, asking him to write & ask the D. here how I was, but I am afraid he has not done it. I think it would be worth while, if you easily could, to get some influential person to do that say Prof. Benjamin Moore. He might say that he hears I am not very well (some one going out w. tell him that) & he is anxious about me. The D. has the power of saying

that any one is not well enough to stay in prison, & in any case, it shows the people here that we have friends who count. I suppose Mr. Runciman would not make any move in the matter; it would have a good effect if he would. Dr. Anderson got let out after 5 or 6 weeks, & Dr. Ede was released from Aylesbury during the hunger strike. I wish Dr. Morris would agitate for getting the lectures of the Welsh Memorial Scheme back but perhaps he still thinks, as he did in November, that we ought to be horse-whipped!

I am rather puzzled about your movements but perhaps your letter will explain. Did you travel back during the night? The Gap paper note was dated 7:30 a.m. & the parcel was sent at Park Station, while the telegram was handed in at L'pool "D" whatever that may mean, at 10.22. I keep wondering what you did. Perhaps you went from Park so as to get a P.O. close to the tunnel, or perhaps some one posted it for you.

The American girl who is here had a letter addressed only "Miss Alice Morgan Wright, London, England". She had in her batch given her on Saturday, a proposal of marriage, an offer of a long and remunerative lecturing tour, & a request for a series of articles for a Press Agency, to state her own terms. See what it is to be an American Suffragette in an English prison! She has been doing sculpture in Paris, & came here expressly for this business. She drew a most amusing set of pictures, on the brown toilet paper I wrote to you on, illustrating her adventures in Holloway, according to the American newspapers, walking round the exercise yard chained to other scrubbing the floors for hard labour, &c. Did I tell you that the American consul wanted to have her out, & she said she would not go unless all the other suffragettes did?

I must stop now & give this to be taken out tomorrow. When Mr. Marshall goes. We shall miss her very much. Very, very much love, my darlings.
Always your loving Mother,

Alice J. Stewart Ker.