

Writings

1	3	2
---	---	---

A PRISONER IN BOW.

My eight days license had expired. The police were massed outside the Bromley Public Hall where I was speaking, waiting to arrest me. Numbers of detectives in plain clothes were amongst the audience, the people hissed and howled at them and they threatened them with sticks. At the close of the meeting, the people, declaring that I should not be arrested, crowded down the stairs and out in a thick mass with me in the centre of them all. The police rushed at us striving to break our ranks and to force a way through to me. Then the fire hose was turned on the police, one policeman was bowled over like a nine pin, others were pushed back and we rushed past and into the shop where I had been told that I was to stay. So for that night I went free.

On the following Sunday, Trafalgar Square was filled with men and women. They say there has not been so large a crowd there since the eighties. In spite of a host of uniformed policemen and detectives I found my way to the platform. The people greeted me with cheers. Eagerly they agreed to go with me to Downing Street to carry our Women's Declarations of Independence to the Prime Minister's official residence. I sprang from the plinth. Friends caught me and closed around me, forcing the police away. All the vast gathering swarmed behind.

At the top of Whitehall we met policemen on horseback. We rushed between them and pressed on. The people protecting me were in a thick bunch with their arms around each other. "Coppers behind us, coppers behind us" hoarse voices shouted. There were policemen dragging us from the rear. A number of constables came running towards us up Whitehall. They closed with us striking at men and women. There was a growling thunderous sound around me, the deep anger of many voices such as I had never heard before. A thin bald-headed man in poor clothes was knocked down just beside me. He rolled on the ground. I called out but we were swept on - over him I feared. The people just in front began to shout: "Keep back, keep back" There



Pank

A PRISONER IN BOW.

My eight days license had expired. The police were massed outside the Bromley Public Hall where I was speaking, waiting to arrest me. Numbers of detectives in plain clothes were amongst the audience, the people hissed and howled at them and they threatened them with sticks. At the close of the meeting, the people, declaring that I should not be arrested, crowded down the stairs and out in a thick mass with me in the centre of them all. The police rushed at us striving to break our ranks and to force a way through to me. Then the fire hose was turned on the police, one policeman was bowled over like a nine pin, others were pushed back and we rushed past and into the shop where I had been told that I was to stay. So for that night I went free.

On the following Sunday, Trafalgar Square was filled with men and women. They say there has not been so large a crowd there since the eighties. In spite of a host of uniformed policemen and detectives I found my way to the platform. The people greeted me with cheers. Eagerly they agreed to go with me to Downing Street to carry our Women's Declarations of Independence to the Prime Minister's official residence. I sprang from the plinth. Friends caught me and closed around me, forcing the police away. All the vast gathering swarmed behind.

At the top of Whitehall we met policemen on horseback. We rushed between them and pressed on. The people protecting me were in a thick bunch with their arms around each other. "Coppers behind us, coppers behind us" hoarse voices shouted. There were policemen dragging us from the rear. A number of constables came running towards us up Whitehall. They closed with us striking at men and women. There was a growling thunderous sound around me, the deep anger of many voices such as I had never heard before. A thin bald-headed man in poor clothes was knocked down just beside me. He rolled on the ground. I called out but we were swept on - over him I feared. The people just in front began to shout: "Keep back, keep back" There



was someone else on the ground. I and those beside me also shouted. We tried to stop. It was no use, we were forced on. I saw something dark on the ground. I felt something soft. It was a woman I thought. I was born on forward by the arms and shoulders. I drew up my feet that I might not step on what was on the ground. That was all that I could do. There was a taxi-cab in the middle of the road right in our path. My friends opened the door and asked me to ride away, hoping that I might thus elude the police, I said: "I am going with you to Downing Street" The cab-door was shut. We passed on.

Soon reinforcements from Scotland - a great company - came upon us. Dashing in amongst the men and women who protected me, striking them, knocking them down, arresting some, they dragged me away. My hat was torn off in the struggle. Policemen were on every side of me. Two of them ^{and bruised} gripped my arms dragging me along. The crowd followed calling to me.

As I was forced past the end of Downing Street, I saw a double cordon of foot police drawn across the head of it and at the other end a mass of mounted men. I called to the people to go there and tried to wrench myself free that I might go with them. The policemen dug their fingers into my flesh. One of them took out his truncheon and grasped it tight against my hand and arm. The back of my left hand was bruised from it all next day. Several women rushed up to me and were arrested and one girl who did not know any of us or even what the trouble was about called out: "Oh, you should not hurt her" and was taken into custody. They dragged me into Cannon Row Police Station. The charge room was soon crowded with men and women and the policemen who had arrested them. Many of our friends had received very violent usage, clothes had been torn and faces scratched.

It was very hot, the air was exhausted, but the windows were kept shut to prevent the crowd outside from seeing us. Some of the women asked the police to give me a drink and after a time two glasses of water were brought for the prisoners, but I did not take any for I was already beginning the hunger and thirst strike. The busi-



ness of charging the prisoners was a very slow one and when the police vigilance relaxed, I went to the window and opened the casement a few inches. A policeman at once shut it and as he did so, I saw that there were two tumblers, one within the other, standing on the sill. I snatched them up and threw them through the pane. I cut my finger a little, but we had air at last. Then I went back to my seat.

Just as the last of our comrades were being charged, three big detectives came to me saying: "Miss Pankhurst, will you come into the doctor's room". "What should I go into the doctor's room for?" I asked, but one of them said: "Carry her" and they suddenly seized me and dragged me out of the charge room to the yard outside and into a taxicab. Then the three big men got into the cab with me. I knew that it is the rule that women prisoners who are being taken from the police court to prison shall be accompanied by a woman, and though I personally felt quite able to take care of myself, I felt it my duty to call attention to this as the rule has been made for the protection of women prisoners. No notice was taken of my protest and when I tried to get at the cab window the policemen seized my wrists and held them all the way to Holloway.

So, hatless and without so much as a brush and comb, I was taken back to goal to begin my hunger, thirst, and sleep strike. When I reached my cell, the same cell in the hospital in which during February and March I had been forcibly fed for five weeks I began to pace up and down. A woman officer came to me and said I must not make a noise. I knew that on one side of my cell was a staircase and on the other the lavatory and the sink where the washing up is done, so that I was unlikely to disturb anyone, but I took a blanket off the bed and laid it on the floor to deaden the sound of my footsteps, lest any of the other women prisoners should hear them and be kept awake.

Then I walked on and on, five short steps across the cell and five short steps back, on and on, on and on. The gaslight hurt my eyes. I covered the square pane of glass by which it shone in with a card, but still the shine of it made me dizzy as I turned. Through the heavy chequered bars of the window I watched the sky, a misty blackish grey charged with an under glow of angry yellow fire, sullen and ominous cast



by the lights of London streets.

As the hours dragged their slow way, I stumbled often over the blanket that wrinkled up and caught in my feet. Often I stooped with dizzy brain to straighten it. The walking, the ceaseless walking when I was so tired, made me grow sick, sick and faint. I was stumbling, falling to my knees, clutching, as one drowning, at the bed or chair. Sometimes I think I slept an instant or two as I lay, for sleep seemed to be dogging me as I walked.

It was cold, cold, and colder as the morning came, as the sombre yellow faded and the grey sky turned violet - such a strange brilliant violet, almost startling it seemed through those heavy bars. Then the violet died into the bleak whity chill of early day.

In the daytime I still walked but sometimes I had to rest in the hard wooden chair and then I would be startled to feel my head nod heavily to one side. My legs ached. The soles of my feet were ~~also~~ swollen. They burned and I thought of the women of past days who were made to walk on red hot plough shares for their faith. After the first few days I remembered that tramps rub soap on their feet to prevent their getting sore. I rubbed soap on mine and found that it eased them a good deal.

Each time I took my stockings off to do this I noticed that my feet had grown more purple. My hands too, were purple as they hung at my sides. My throat was parched and dry. My lips were cracked. On Wednesday I fainted twice, and afterwards there came and stayed till I was released, a strange feeling of pressure in the head especially in the ears. I was breathing quickly as I drew in a breath or let it out. I felt the pressure most and there was a roaring noise in my ears. There was a sharp pain across my chest. That evening I asked to see a doctor from the Home Office. On Thursday afternoon he came. On Friday there was no more likelihood of my sleeping. I lay on the bed most of the day burning hot with cold shivers that seemed to pass over me as though a cold win were blowing on my skin. In the afternoon I was released and came back to the little red-roofed houses under St. Stephen's Church and the kind hearts of Bow.

by the lights of London streets.

As the hours dragged their slow way, I stumbled often over the blanket that wrinkled up and caught in my feet. Often I stooped with dizzy brain to straighten it. The walking, the ceaseless walking when I was so tired, made me grow sick, sick and faint. I was stumbling, falling to my knees, clutching, as one drowning, at the bed or chair. Sometimes I think I slept an instant or two as I lay, for sleep seemed to be dogging me as I walked.

It was cold, cold, and colder as the morning came, as the sombre yellow faded and the grey sky turned violet - such a strange brilliant violet, almost startling it seemed through those heavy bars. Then the violet died into the bleak whity chill of early day.

In the daytime I still walked but sometimes I had to rest in the hard wooden chair and then I would be startled to feel my head nod heavily to one side. My legs ached. The soles of my feet were ~~slow~~ swollen. They burned and I thought of the women of past days who were made to walk on red hot-plough shares for their faith. After the first few days I remembered that tramps rub soap on their feet to prevent their getting sore. I rubbed soap on mine and found that it eased them a good deal.

Each time I took my stockings off to do this I noticed that my feet had grown more purple. My hands too, were purple as they hung at my sides. My throat was parched and dry. My lips were cracked. On Wednesday I fainted twice, and afterwards there came and stayed till I was released, a strange feeling of pressure in the head especially in the ears. I was breathing quickly as I drew in a breath or let it out. I felt the pressure most and there was a roaring noise in my ears. There was a sharp pain across my chest. That evening I asked to see a doctor from the Home Office, On Thursday afternoon he came. On Friday there was no more likelihood of my sleeping. I lay on the bed most of the day burning hot with cold shivers that seemed to pass over me as though a cold win were blowing on my skin. In the afternoon I was released and came back to the little red-roofed houses under St. Stephen's Church and the kind hearts of Bow.

A Prisoner's Life in Bow.

by

E. Sylvia Pankhurst.

The Roman Road, Bow, is always crowded. It is far too narrow for the business that it does. The shops are small and seem to be overflowing with their goods. Many of the shopkeepers cover half the pavement with their wares. Lining the gutter on either side of the road are stalls where they sell everything that can be bought in the shops and many things besides. There is an incessant noise and clatter of voices. The butchers shout louder than any "buy! buy! buy!", thumping the block with a mallet and flourishing their knives.

Leading from the Roman Road is Ford Road, a quiet street of little workmen's houses dimly lit. The blackened brick houses are most of them built close against the pavement without even a railing to divide them from the street. They contain from four to six little rooms. The rents vary - that charged for one of the four-roomed houses, is 22/6 a week - a higher sum than is asked for most of its neighbours, because it has a rather large yard at the back!

The house in which I stay has six rooms. It belongs to a shoemaker and his wife. The front door is narrow, with one low step. It opens into a dark passage, scarcely four feet wide. There is a disconcerting step

^{down}
just inside which my host and hostess, Mr. & Mrs Payne, tell me will be useful should any police spy burst in unawares.

On the right hand, as one enters, is the parlour, a little room crowded with furniture. Straight before one are the narrow stairs. Behind the parlour is a room, no bigger than a large-sized cupboard, the floor of which is littered with shoe leather and linings and piled with lasts. There is also the machine for cutting out the sole leather and the eyeletting machine.

Further on at the end of the passage is the kitchen - a narrow slip of a room in which there is scarcely space to turn between the little kitchen range and the narrow table under the window. It is just possible to accommodate three chairs there, ^{the door and window} one facing on either side of the window, but the second of these has to be moved a little each time anyone wants to go out into the yard.

On the wall on each side of the range are some shelves on which are a few books and the housewife's sewing basket. Against the wall on the near side of the fireplace is a dresser on which is arranged some pretty old-fashioned china, including part of a fine old dinner service and some charming cups and saucers - all of different patterns.

Mrs Payne, who began sewing ^{boot and} shoe and boot soles at twelve years old, is evidently a better judge of china

than many a so-called connoisseur^S_A, for she chose her specimens for their intrinsic beauty and knows nothing of maker's names or marks. She picked up her cups and saucers, by ones and twos, from secondhand shops and stalls, to take home to a feeble minded daughter, who lived to be twenty-three and died two years ago.

My kind friends put me in the parlour when first I came here and tied up the knocker of the front door to deaden the noise, but the people were passing all day close under the window. We had to keep it muffled with lace curtains to shut out curious eyes. So the husband and wife spent a day scrubbing and turning out their own bedroom and carried me upstairs there.

The stairs are very steep and narrow, with a sharp turn where one may easily fall down, as there is so little light.

My room is like the kitchen, but bigger, because it covers the scullery as well. The wall-paper is dull and drab, sprinkled with browney flowers. These little houses are seldom given over to a single family and this room, in order that it may be convenient for a separate tenant, has its own little kitchen range with an oven at the side, a gas ring for boiling the kettle and in one corner a sink and water tap. There is a dresser between the door and the kitchen range and above the range is a cheap sitting-room mantelpiece, on which

were various gaudy ornaments, most of which I have gradually stowed away. There is, besides, a narrow table, against the side window, a little table at the end, two or three chairs, and a little folding bed. These fill the room.

The side window faces a similar window in the adjoining house, about 10 feet away, and looks down on a high wooden paling and a strip of paved yard. The end window has a broader outlook. From it one can see the backs of the little red-roofed houses in the next street and their narrow strips of ~~basen~~ back yard, full of variety and colour. In one of these grow tall yellow sunflowers, in many are cocks and hens. In one yard, longer and wider than the others, which has obviously stolen pieces from its neighbours, herrings are split and smoked. In the house opposite to ours, a purple, white and green flag has been flying since the summer when I first came here. It has grown grimy with London smoke.

In that house a girl of nineteen lies dying. The doctor has given no hope for nine long months. The neighbours say she has "coughed up" all her lungs. Last time I saw her her face was bright and she helped me to escape. I did not know then that she was ill.

Two steps up from my room lead to a little top landing from which opens the tiny "sew-round" room, where Mrs. Payne works at the soles of Jaeger shoes, and the front bedroom, the biggest room in the house. This was let to a lodger when

I first came here, but now we hold little members' meetings in it and use it for a spare bedroom for suffragettes, or for my nurse, when I come out of prison.

Mrs. Payne's parents died in her early childhood - I do not think she can even remember them. She and her brother were brought up by their grandmother, who also lived by sewing shoes. The Poor Law Authorities allowed the old woman half-a-crown a week and a loaf of bread for bringing up the two children, but her son, the children's uncle, hated to see the children eat it and he would say to the little girl "Don't you eat that workhouse bred Jess - you shall have the same as us".

One day the little girl of five was taken before the Board of Guardians and, standing up on a table, was asked why she refused to eat the workhouse bread. She said "because it's puddeney" - it was the only thing she could think of to say. After that the old grandmother was allowed another 5d a week instead of the bread.

When Mrs. Payne - her name was then Jessie Avery - was twelve years of age, she had already known for some time how to sew the soles of shoes. But she did not like to sit still to work very long and her grandmother sent her out as a little servant maid. The mistress was very strict with her and depreciated everything she did. But Jessie tried very hard to work and learn. At last the mistress called to her, when she was out in the passage scrubbing and Jessie answered "Yes".

The mistress was angry because she had not said "Yes Ma'am". That was the last straw - Jessie put on her things as fast as she could and ran away home. She threw her arms round her grandmother's neck and said, ^{that} she would sew shoes all day and never grumble again, if only she need not go out to service any more. She has been steadily sewing shoes ever since.

When she was growing to be a woman, Jessie Avery joined the Salvation Army. She has been a soldier ever since and though she has often been asked to become an officer she has always said No. The Army was going through troublous times in the early days when she joined it. A band of roughs called the Skeleton Army was ever ready to break its meetings up. Once, when a new centre was to be opened Jessie Avery was asked to keep the door. A crowd of men came up, smoking long clay pipes and with jugs of beer in their hands. They wanted to push their way in, but she was not afraid of them and ordered them to stand back. She recognised most of them for they also were employed at shoemaking and she had often seen them at the factory where she took her work. They recognised her also and, either for that reason or because of her determination, they retreated several paces and stood quietly waiting for some time. Presently, however, the Lieutenant in charge of the meeting came to the door. He pushed Jessie Avery inside and told the men to go. But the restraint that one woman had held over them was broken. They swept roughly in, knocking down the lieutenant. They crowded

the benches, and sat shouting and banging their mugs on the tables so that nothing could be heard.

Shortly afterwards ^{this incident} Jessie Avery married Mr. Payne and both have since made shoes together. Two children were born to them, who died in infancy, and then came Jessie, a poor little feeble minded girl. She was always of frail physique and subject to strange fits of temper, which would come over her without warning like a cloud. But Mrs Payne says she had nice ways too and certainly she adored her more than a mother does a normal child and learned to school herself to wonderful, unwearrying patience.

One evening, when the girl had been with her mother to a Salvation Army meeting the girl was strangely excited. She lay awake, singing hymns all night and kept saying: "I'm a cadet, I'm a cadet". Next morning Mrs. Payne sent for the doctor. He wrote a note and gave it to her to post. Next day an ambulance came to take the girl away "I won't let her go" Mrs. Payne cried in horror. "I think we're compelled to" her husband replied. The ambulance men carried the girl away, but next morning Mrs. Payne determined to go to Poplar Workhouse Infirmary to see her. The husband and wife went together. At first they were refused. Mrs. Payne pleaded anxiously to see her darling but was roughly told to be quiet, as she was not the legal parent of the girl. Mr. Payne stormed at that - He was more angered than at the original refusal, for he allows no one to speak rudely to Mrs. Payne. At last his storming

was successful. They were allowed to see the girl. They found her in a padded cell, the temperature of which was over 100 degrees. She was lying on the ground, panting, and crying for a drink of water. Her hair and her clothes were dishevelled, her hands and arms were scratched. "Why is she here? - what have you been doing to her?" the parents asked. The reply was that she had been put in the padded cell because she had annoyed the matron by singing hymns. "Why is the place so hot?" Mr. Payne asked, pointing to the thermometer. The excuse given to him was that some of the insane inmates had been playing with the heating apparatus. Meanwhile the girl was begging to go home and begging for a drink of water. They had refused her everything but milk, she said. The parents wanted to take their daughter home with them at once, but it was twenty-four hours before they were able to secure her release. She never recovered either physically or mentally from the shock of her experiences in the workhouse, ~~but~~ she lay in bed for some months, growing steadily weaker- then died.

Next door to us in Ford Road is a widow whose children are now all married and gone out in the world. Sometimes, when I stand outside in the little patch of back yard behind our house, she comes out too and we have a conversation. She is harder in her judgments than most of our neighbours and I suspect that she thinks we suffragettes are fools to worry about anything but ^{our} own private affairs. She tells me that certain little two-roomed hovels, where live some very poor people "spoil our road". She speaks very scathingly of the majority of very

poor people, but for all that I believe she is herself a worthy woman and perhaps it is the fact that she came from the Isle of Wight originally that has given her snobbish tendencies. She tells me that years ago, when her children were all little, she was very ill and had to go to the hospital for many weeks. When she came out she found that at home they had not been able to "manage" without her - everything was in a muddle - the children neglected and the husband "seemed to have fallen away" Soon afterwards he died. She was still weak from an operation, but she had to buckle to and make ends meet. It was a hard struggle, but she says: "it was better for the children that it should be him that was took and not me"

That was a new thought to me. Women's wages are so miserably low in East London that it is difficult to conceive how a family can be better off having only a mother's earnings to subsist on, than where there is a father's wages coming in. But it is true, ^{Kab} women are more adaptable than men and however hard they work and however little they get for working, most of the mothers manage to keep their homes passably comfortable and clean. Nevertheless, the life of the poor widow is a grim, unremitting struggle with hunger and destitution, that leaves her no time for ^{vac or} holiday.

A few doors away from us lives a woman who supports a paralysed husband and three little children by making pinafores. She earns eight shillings a week in good seasons and the Poor Law Authorities allow her 5/- a week out-relief. Every month

or so she has to go up before the Board to state her case afresh. Every five months her children have to go up to be weighed to see if they are fat enough, for, if not, the five shillings a week will be stopped. A man relieving officer pays ^{her} surprise visits and turns down the beds and looks in all the corners, to see whether the beds and house ^{is} are clean. She is pale and wan with ceaseless work and anxiety, and tremblingly fearful lest anything she has said may come to the ears of those who dole out to her that paltry 5/- a week. *What a scandal it is that our great rich country should do no more than this for working widows!*

On fine Sunday mornings Ford Road is made quite gay by the children playing in the road. Nice little girls, with newly washed hair and clean white pinafores, play "Oranges and Lemons", "London Bridge is broken down", and other old English singing games, ^{which} ^{now} they are beginning to be taught in the elementary schools.

When I look out of the front window people on the doorsteps opposite call out to me "How are you, Sylvia?" and wave their hands.

One Monday morning I suddenly thought I would ask my neighbours in the road to have tea with me that afternoon, so I sent someone out to each one of them. This impromptu canvass disclosed the fact that all the women in the street, with one exception, were enthusiastic suffragettes. Many of the women were washing, but as many came as we could pack into the room. They told us that that very morning they had each been called on by the detective, ^{watch the house where I stay, and who} who had told each woman in turn, that, if she would only let him a room in her house, he would pay anything

she liked to ask. "It will be a small fortune to you" they ^{detectives} had [^] been ^{said} told, but every woman in the street refused. We were told by her neighbour that one very poor widow, with a little baby, and several young daughters, answered them: "That money wouldn't do me any good if I was to do anything to injure that young woman opposite". [When I come out of prison the people bring me all sorts of gifts. An old lady, who has had an injury to her hands and lives on 5/- a week that she gets from the Poor Law Guardians, went all the way to Poplar to buy me two new-laid eggs from someone who keeps hens. A Covent Garden porter brought me a huge bunch of flowers tied up with purple white and green ribbon and his wife brought me a big clump of bananas. One of our young members, who is a dressmaker, knitted some little mats for me one time I was released and another time made me a pretty little white silk dorothy bag. [^] Seeing me use it at my first meeting, she sat up ^{half} the same night ^{to make} making me a black silk one because it would be "more useful", [^] so she thought.

Dozens of people bring me flowers, some of them grown in their own little gardens.

When I go out to meetings the people cluster round me, trying to save me from arrest and many, many times, in spite of the armies of policemen and ^{that are sent to take me} detectives, [^] they have successfully brought me home.

The affectionate co-operation of the people and their enthusiastic zeal to secure that women shall be politically free, make life abundantly worth living for a prisoner in Bow. They

make it too - should the fates so decide it - abundantly worth
while to die.