

## THE KILMAINHAM TORTURES

### EXPERIENCES OF A ~~RELEASED~~ PRISONER

It was the nineteenth day of their hunger-strike. Mrs. O'Callaghan was suffering a great deal and we were very anxious about Miss MacSwiney; she seemed much weaker than on her last day in Mountjoy, restless, troubled by heart attacks and sudden alarming collapses: we knew the Doctor had made an urgent report and hoped, every time the gate opened, to see two stretcher-bearers coming in.

At about 3 o'clock word came from the Governor that we were to be removed to the North Dublin Union that night; a meeting of the prisoners was immediately summoned, it was unanimous: to leave the hunger-strikers alone in the empty jail, at the mercy of such cruel tricks as were played on Miss Costello, was unthinkable; we sent our decision to the Governor at 4 o'clock: no prisoner would consent to leave until the hunger-strikers were released. We expected their release at any moment and we went to our cells to pack. It was about 9 o'clock when the Governor, Begley, sent again to say that 81 prisoners were to be removed, if necessary by force. When asked whether woman-beating was a soldier's work he replied, "I don't mind that, I have beaten my wife." We prepared our plan of resistance. Suddenly a rumour flew through the prison; stretcher-bearers had come in: then a moment of joyous triumph and a shock of dismay, - Mrs. O'Callaghan was released but not Miss MacSwiney. This was appalling news; we knew that Miss MacSwiney was no less dangerously ill than Mrs. O'Callaghan; they had been on hunger-strike the same number of days, arrested in the same circumstances; it suggested malice against Miss MacSwiney that, for all we knew, might intend her death.

Our best strategic position seemed to be the top gallery, caged in with iron bars, which runs round the horse-shoe shaped building and has an iron bridge joining its opposite sides. From this bridge an iron staircase runs down to the compound; it is so narrow and steep that a stretcher cannot be carried down. Miss MacSwiney's cell is on the ground floor. The prisoners marshalled themselves on the top gallery and waited. We had fastened the doors of the cells and the great well-like place was in darkness, except for one lit window beside the gateway behind which figures of soldiers and wardresses hurried to and fro.

Our officers gave out our instructions; we were to resist but not to attack; we were not to come to one another's rescue; no missiles were to be thrown; above all, for the patient's sake, whatever was done to us, no one must cry out. Then we knelt and said the rosary. There was no sign of an attack. We stood three deep arms locked, and sang, as we do every evening, some of Miss MacSwiney's favourite songs. At 10 o'clock our deputies were called to the Governor again and after a short time they returned. Mr. O'Neill, Governor of the North Dublin Union, was there; he had expressed dread of what seemed about to happen, promised that if 81 would go quietly to-night no one else should be removed before Miss MacSwiney was released, warned us that if we resisted, all the "privileges" we had won through our seven days' hunger-strike would be withdrawn; he implored us not to resist; we had ten minutes in which to decide. He was

told once more that no prisoner would consent to be removed until Miss MacSwiney was released.

Ten minutes passed, then, up the staircase, with a lighted taper, one of the matrons came; she had seen the men who were to do the work; she was agitated and distressed; had come, on her own responsibility, to implore us to give way; they were not the military; they were C.I.D. men and military police; she could not bear the thought of their handling the girls; "You have no idea", she said, "what horrible men they are." She went down again heavy-hearted; not understanding us at all. "God pity you, girls", she said, "You are going into the hands of men worse than devils."

For a little longer we waited, then, suddenly, the gate opened and the men rushed in, across the compound and up the stairs. The attack was violent but unorganised. Brigid O'Mullane and Rita Farrelly, the first seized, were crushed and bruised between men dragging them down and men pressing up the stairs.

Our Commandant, Mrs. Gordon, was the next to be attacked. It was hard not to go to her rescue. She clung to the iron bars, the men beat her hands with their clenched fists again and again; that failed to make her loose her hold and they struck her twice in the chest; then one took her head and beat it against the iron bars. I think she was unconscious after that; I saw her dragged by the soldiers down the stairs, all across the compound and out at the gate.

The men seemed skilled; they had many methods. Some twisted the girls' arms, some bent back their thumbs; one who seized Iseult Stuart kicked her on the stairs with his knee. Brigid O'Mullane, Sheila Hartnett, Roisin Ryan and Melina Bhelin were kicked by a C.I.D. man who used his feet. Florence MacDermott was disabled by a blow on the ankle with a revolver; Annie McKeown, one of the smallest and youngest, was pulled downstairs and kicked, perhaps accidentally, on the head. One girl had her finger bitten. Sheila Bowen fell with a heart attack. Lily Dunn and May O'Toole who have been very ill, fainted; they do not know where they were struck. There was one man with a blackened face. When my own turn came, after I had been dragged from the railings, a great hand closed on my face, blinding and stifling me, and thrust me back down to the ground among trampling feet. I heard someone who saw it scream and wondered how Miss MacSwiney would bear the noise. After that I remember being carried by two or three men and flung down in the surgery to be searched. Mrs. Wilson and Mrs. Gordon were there, their faces bleeding. One of the women searchers was screaming at them like a drunkard in Camden Street on Saturday night; she struck Mrs. Gordon in the face. In spite of a few violent efforts to pinion us they did not persist in searching us. They had had their lesson in Mountjoy. They contented themselves with removing watches, fountain pens and brooches, kicking Peg Flanagan and beating Kathleen O'Carroll on the head with her shoe.

I stood in the passage then, waiting for the girls to be flung out, one by one. None were frightened or overcome, but many were half fainting. Lena O'Doherty had been struck on the mouth; one man had thrust a finger down Maira Broderick's throat. Many of the men were smoking all the time - our

instructions not to hit back had been well obeyed. Some soldiers who were on guard there looked wretched; the wardresses were bringing us cups of water; they were crying; the prison doctor looked on smiling, smoking a cigarette, he seemed to have come for entertainment; he did nothing for the injured girls.

There was another struggle before we were thrown into the lorries, one by one, and driven away. It took five hours.

Dorothy MacArdle.

Military Prison, North Dublin Union, May 1st, 1923