CHAPTER 4

Paying the Price
Militancy, Prison, and Violence

Knowing that she would shortly be heading to gaol (jail), Emily Davison made her will on October 20, 1909, the same day she was arrested in Radcliffe, near Manchester, for breaking windows in protest against the exclusion of women from a public meeting being held by Sir Walter Runciman.¹ Not knowing what might happen to them in prison, many suffragettes wrote their wills when they expected to have to serve time in prison. Davison’s will is formulaic, short, and to the point: if she were to die she left all her “personal property and money” to her mother. As it turned out, she was convicted and sentenced to two months hard labor in Strangeways Gaol, a minatory sentence seemingly out of proportion to the offence she committed, and likely intended to be a warning to other suffragettes.

Davison endured many imprisonments, but the term she served in the fall of 1909 and the six months she served in the spring of 1912 became celebrated cases in which she accused agents of the Government—and, by extension members, of the Cabinet—of gratuitous cruelty and torture. Publicized, debated in Parliament, the details of the two imprisonments raised questions then, as they do today, about disproportionate and punitive sentences and about the status of the politically powerless at the mercy of the full power of the state. In particular the two cases highlight how women, overwhelmed by what Davison referred to as “brute force,” turned food into a strategic weapon. The use of voluntary starvation as a tactic to expose the ruthless-

¹ One of the witnesses of her will was Helen Gordon Liddle, also arrested with Davison on the same charge; the other, Jane Ratcliffe, was treasurer of the Manchester branch of the WSPU.
ness of their opponents testifies to both their bravery and the government's intransigence.  

The crime and the two imprisonments described in this chapter center in struggle between the militant weapon of the hunger strike and the government weapon of forcible feeding by means of nasal and oral tubes inserted violently, painfully, and against the will of the women subjected to a deliberate form of torture masked as concern for their health. The stories are narrated by Davison and her contemporaries. Taken together, the documents display the complex dynamics of the ultimate form of suffragette protests—bodies on the line, the doctrine of no surrender, willingness to submit to the court and prison system in order to use them to suffer ends, and a reliance on the press to bring it all to the attention to the British public. Although she is the center of all the events she describes, Emily Davison writes with a sense of distance and a lack of emotion, which may be a conscious choice in order to emphasize her steadfast determination to endure whatever she must suffer. From time to time her sense of humor reflects the narratives, even at the most dramatic moments. She explains her choices as formed with an expectation that "the sacrifice we have all agreed will probably be demanded" is at hand.

Prisons and Protests


MISS DAVISON RELEASED AFTER THE USE OF THE HOSE-PIPE

The authorities at Manchester have gone one step too far in their efforts to break down the invincible determination of the Suffragette prisoners. As we

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2. Suffragettes were injured and some died years before Emily Davison's death. Mary Pilsbury, who was forcibly fed, died by suicide in early 1910 (Hansard, HC Debate, April 19, 1910, vol. 16), after her release from prison. The death of Mary Clarke, sister to Emmeline Pankhurst, was reported in Votes for Women on January 13, 1911. She died on Christmas Day 1910, a result of injuries received on Black Friday. Henria Williams, a member of the delegation to Parliament on Black Friday was injured on that occasion, was treated, but never recovered and died two months later. On January 5, 1912, the death of Celia Wolsely Haig was reported in the same paper, "after a year's painful illness brought on in consequence of the terrible treatment to which she was subjected on Black Friday. On April 14, 1912, Votes for Women reported that Mr. William Bull, a male suffragist, was "reduced to insanity after over five weeks' forcible feeding in Pentonville Gaol..."
reported briefly last week, a powerful stream of icy cold water was poured on Miss Davison to make her open her barricaded cell; the news was followed by an outburst of indignation all over the country. Mr. Gladstone [Home Secretary 1905–1910] disclaimed responsibility and promised a special investigation when questioned in the House, and, as will be seen below, many leading newspapers unite in condemning unsparingly the outrageous attack.

MISS DAVISON’S EXPERIENCES.

Miss Davison tells her story in these words:

When I left Strangeways Gaol on September 8 last I had the foreboding that I had not seen the last of its gloomy interior, and on October 21 I again entered its portals in consequence of my protest outside Mr. Runciman’s meeting at Radcliffe. After announcing that we should protest, we were shut up in our solitary cells.

Our hunger strike had been begun in the Bury Police Court itself on Thursday, October 21, and it was on Friday evening that the threatening horror was realized. My cell door opened, the two doctors, the matron, and five or six wardresses entered my cell. The senior doctor sounded me, and said, “I am going to feed you by force.” I protested vehemently that such an operation made against my will was illegal, to which he replied that it was no concern of his. The wardresses seized me and forced me down on the bed. The senior doctor seized my hair and pulled my head by it violently down on the pillow. The scene which followed will haunt me with its horror all my life, and is almost indescribable. While they held me flat the elder doctor tried all round my mouth with the steel gag to find an opening. On the right side of my mouth two teeth are missing; this gap he found, pushed in the horrid instrument, and prised open my mouth to its widest extent. Then a wardress poured liquid down my throat out of a tin enameled cup. What it was I could not say, but there was some medicament which was foul to the last degree. As I could not swallow the stuff and jerked it out with my tongue, the doctor pinched my nose and somehow gripped my tongue with the gag. The torture was barbaric!

THE BARRICADE

On Monday afternoon a wardress put me into the empty next door cell as they were having my broken window pane mended.3 The moment she closed the door I saw that there were two plank beds in the cell, the one they had

3. Emily Davison had broken the window.
taken from me in the morning and the one belonging to the cell. Quick as
thought I put them quietly down lengthwise, one touching the other. A space
of about a foot or more remained, which was filled by the stool, legs upward.
The wedge was not absolutely firm, so I jammed in my two slippers and a hair
brush. I sat down on the only doubtful spot, between the two beds, piled up
the table and mattress to make weight, and my blockade was complete.

Presently the wardress returned. She unlocked the door, but found it
would not move. Looking in through the spy hole, she found the reason,
and implored me to open the door. I smiled, and said “No.” She went away. I
seemed to sit there the whole afternoon. People came again and again to the
door, and alternately begged me to open the door, and uttered dire threats.
Presently some men came with crowbars and began to prise open the door at
the top. These tactics, however, they seemed to abandon soon. A man in au-
thority came and called me to get off the planks. I made no answer. Again an
interval. Then the same voice called out, “Davison, if you don’t get off those
planks and open the door we shall turn the hose-pipe on you.” I sat perfectly
calm. At last a ladder appeared at the window. Then followed a crash of glass.
I looked round and saw the nozzle of a hose-pipe. They took a long time to
get it fixed in position, and when they had done so the voice at the door gave
me one more chance. Then came the deluge! At first the stream shot over
my head. I took hold of the bed-boards and sat firm. Then they got the water
trained full on me; the stream came straight at me full force. I had to hold on
like grim death. The power of the water seemed terrific, and it was cold as ice.
For an age it seemed to play on me, though it may have been only a quarter of
an hour, and my gasps for breath were getting more and more spasmodic. At
last the operator halted for a moment, and a voice called out quickly, “Stop!
no more! no more!”

Then they determined to burst open the door. It was clear to me that
if the door fell it would kill me on the spot. The thought in my mind was
that the moment for the sacrifice, which we have all agreed will probably be
demanded, was at hand, and, strange to say, I had no fear. Those outside,
however, had also realised the danger. They called out, “If you don’t move off
that plank you will be seriously hurt.” The door gave! I watched it, fascinated.
As it lurched, however, hands seized it. The gap widened. A male warder
rushed in and seized me, saying as he did so, “You ought to be horsewhipped
for this.” The bed-board was taken up, the door opened, and the water (about
six inches deep) rushed out into the corridor. I was hurried into my original
cell. My clothes were literally torn off me by the matron and wardresses. They wrapped me in blankets, put me in an invalid chair, and rushed me off to the hospital. I was put in a hot bath, rubbed down, all of them meantime commenting on my iron determination. I was then put into bed between blankets with a hot bottle.

Soon afterwards I was forcibly fed by the nasal tube. This is a very painful operation. A tube about 2 ft. in length, with a glass cup attached, is thrust up one nostril, going down into the throat, and the liquid food is administered. If the tube does not go down properly the doctor pushes it down with his fingers.

On Tuesday morning they made me get up, but I was so cold that they had to put me back to bed, where I stayed till Thursday morning. They forced me to exercise that day, where I saw my two comrades, Miss Liddle and Miss Tolson. Both looked very ill, and gave me to understand that they were being forcibly fed. Miss Sheppard, I learnt, had been in hospital nearly all the time with a badly ulcerated stomach.

On Thursday afternoon a wardress came and took me to hospital. There an outside doctor saw and examined me. I was forcibly fed for the last time about 5.30. As I had a pain in my side, I lay on the bed. About 6 o'clock the matron came and told me an order had come for my release.

To my surprise, I found my hosepipe incident known throughout England, and being brought up in Parliament, as I had feared the suppression of all news about us. Is Right beginning to prevail over Might at last?

Following up on the publicity she had inadvertently generated, Davison sued the prison authorities for damages, and while there were some who publicly commended the prison authorities who had assaulted her with the hose pipe, she was successful in her suit and in rousing public opinion, as the news stories below show. The trial testimony reveals misogynistic prejudices against women in general and suffragettes in particular. Emily Davison's testimony is recorded at some length.

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4 Helen Gordon Liddle wrote eloquently of her experiences being forcibly fed in The Prisoner: An Experience of Forcible Feeding by a Suffragette (Letchworth: Garden City Press, 1912). Her sentiments match Emily Davison’s, but she writes in the third person describing an imprisonment she endured with the help of reading Jane Austen and Shakespeare (57). In her introduction she wrote more personally about how “artificial feeding... reduces the treatment to the level of an exquisite torture, and one that could only be devised and upheld by a highly-educated country from its degenerate side—none other would so torture its women” (58).
2. Excerpts from “The Hose Pipe Outrage,” Votes for Women, January 14, 1910

JUDGMENT RESERVED IN MISS DAVISON’S ACTION AGAINST THE VISITING JUSTICES.  

The case in which a Suffragette was subjected in prison for several minutes to the play of a hose pipe came before Judge Parry at the Manchester County Court on Monday last. Miss Davison claimed damages to the amount of £200 from Walter Butterworth, George Hahlo, Hugh Howarth, and Arthur Haworth, four of the visiting justices, for giving instructions and passing a resolution for the outrage to be committed.

The defence practically admitted all the facts, acknowledging that the use of the hose pipe was suggested by the Foreman of Works of the prison and carried out on the instruction of the Justices, without consulting the Governor, doctor, or matron of the prison. Most of the witnesses for the defence expressed regret for the incident, but the Foreman of Works stated that he would recommend similar treatment on another occasion provided the prisoner was a woman, but doubted whether he would do so in the case of a man. He also admitted that it would have been perfectly possible to have taken steps, by means of staples, ropes, or chains, to prevent the door falling upon the prisoner when it opened. A technical legal defence was put forward on behalf of the justices, and Judge Parry reserved his judgment until Wednesday next.

THE CASE FOR THE PLAINTIFF

Mr. Gordon Hewart said his client, who was a lady of considerable intellectual distinction, was a member of an association called the Women’s Social and Political Union, which maintained that an intelligent taxpayer ought not to be debarred from voting for a representative in the House of Commons merely because she had the good fortune to be a woman. The work had been going on for a long time, with very little apparent result, and so the society had recourse to certain methods of expressing their resentment and of calling attention to what they considered to be their grievances. It was in pursuance of this policy that when, in October last, a Cabinet Minister [Mr. Runciman] was addressing a meeting at Radcliffe, the plaintiff dropped

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5. Sections of the story which recount information in the November 5, 1909, story have been omitted from this narrative.

6. Visiting inspectors charged with seeing that the prison was run according to government regulation.
two stones through the window of a Liberal club. Nobody was hurt and nobody was intended to be hurt. The plaintiff, however, was charged next day at Bury Police Court with doing malicious damage, and was sentenced to two months' imprisonment. On October 21 she was removed to Strangeways Gaol. Pursuing her policy of protest in prison, she refused to put on prison clothes or to take food. This resulted in forcible feeding, which was physically painful and extremely repulsive and degrading. She had a tooth broken in the process, and determining not to submit to the operation any longer, she barricaded her cell door on October 25 with the aid of two plank beds and other articles. Instead of taking the door off its hinges the defendants inserted a large hosepipe through the window and played a strong stream of water upon her. Such was the force of the water that it was only by holding onto the plank beds with both arms with all her might that she was able to avoid being knocked off into the pool which was made. Upon this counsel submitted three propositions: First, that an assault and battery had undoubtedly been committed; secondly, that it was an assault and battery by the defendants; and thirdly, that there was not a shadow of justification for it. The consequences to Miss Davison were most serious, and for some time after it she was laid up. On the whole counsel suggested that this was an assault and battery of an aggravated kind, resembling rather the rash and ill-considered device of irritated, and therefore, injudicious men, than the calm regular proceedings of experienced magistrates.

Mr. Hewart produced copies of the prison regulations, and the extracts from the minute book, the latter showing that the defendants accepted responsibility for instruction to use the hosepipe . . .

CROSS-EXAMINATION BY THE DEFENCE.

This brief fragment is one more illustration of how Emily Davison was adept at giving no more information than was absolutely required, less if possible:

SIR WILLIAM COBBETT: When you went to prison did you tell the matron that you would conform to no prison rules?

EWD: I said that unless we were treated as political prisoners we should not conform to the rules.

COBBETT: May I take it that from the very commencement you never did conform to any prison rule?

EWD: From the commencement of what?

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7. Counsel for the defendants.
COBBETT: From the commencement of your imprisonment on October 21 until your discharge on October 28?
EWD: I did not obey any prison regulations.
COBBETT: To begin with you refused to give your name and then you refused to change your clothes?
EWD: Yes, and I explained all along why.
COBBETT: I suppose we may take it that you did it as a protest?
EWD: Yes
COBBETT: Would you mind telling me whether you are bringing this action at your own cost?
EWD: This action is being brought by the Union on my behalf.
COBBETT: It is being brought at the cost of the Union?
EWD: Yes.

SPEECH FOR THE DEFENCE

Sir William Cobbett, in his speech for the defence, said that within late years there had grown up a class of minor misdemeanants who were disorderly and brawl in the streets and public places, who did what the law called willful damage, and who when sent to prison to expiate their offences were a source of this gravest difficulty and anxiety to all responsible for the management of prisoners, because they traded upon the weaknesses of their sex to avoid the consequences of their misconduct. The result was that it was very difficult to know what were the best measures to be taken in an emergency. The plaintiff in this case entered the prison with the avowed intention of breaking every rule, and this she did in a way that caused the utmost anxiety to those who had to deal with her. She admitted in an article she wrote in a newspaper that if the door had fallen in she would have been crushed. The witnesses he would call would say that instead of being in the shape of punishment the turning on of the water was done entirely for the good of the plaintiff, to remove her if possible from a position where she would inevitably have been seriously hurt, and perhaps killed, if the door had fallen upon her. The position was a serious one, because it was necessary to force open the door in order to administer the food she would not voluntarily take, and in the forcing of the heavy door, which opened inwards, there could be no certainty that the warders would be able to prevent it falling. Sir William quoted from rules and Acts of Parliament in proof of his contention that the defendants, acting as visiting justices, were justified in the action they had authorized.
EVIDENCE FOR THE DEFENSE

Dr. J. Edwards, senior medical officer at Strangeways, declared that Miss Davison was in quite as good general health when she left the prison as when she entered, but was not quite so strong because of not getting proper food. He stated that he had not been consulted in any way as to the proposed use of the hosepipe. Cross-examined, he admitted that this method was a mistake.

Dr. Judson Bury, who was called in to Strangeways after the incident, on the instruction of the Home Secretary, expressed the opinion that the lady was perfectly well.

MR. HEWART: Can you tell me why she was released?

WITNESS: I have formed an opinion from what I have heard, but I don't want to express it in court.

SIR WILLIAM CORBETT: He does not want to quarrel with the Home Secretary.

MR. HEWART: It had nothing to do with her physical condition?

WITNESS: Not so far as I can tell.

FOREMAN OF WORKS ON DIFFERENT TREATMENT FOR MEN AND WOMEN

David Lambert Conroy, foreman of works and engineer in the prison, admitted that the hosepipe incident was suggested to the magistrates by himself. In cross-examination, he refused to say that he regretted what he had recommended; on the contrary, he would employ a similar method again.

MR. GORDON HEWART: Would you recommend it to be applied to a woman?

CONROY: Yes.

MR. GORDON HEWART: To a poor woman weakened by want and privation?

CONROY: Yes.

MR. GORDON HEWART: Would you adopt it in the case of a man?

CONROY: I do not think I should.

Further cross-examined, Mr. Conroy admitted that in this particular instance the method proved ineffective; he also admitted that a man might have entered by the window and opened the door; and that the door could
have been secured from falling upon the plaintiff by means of staples, ropes or chains, only he did not happen to think of that.

Mr. Arthur Haworth and Mr. Hugh Howarth, two of the defendant justices, both declared that the only object they had in view in assenting to Conroy's suggestion was the safety of the plaintiff. In cross-examination, Mr. Arthur Haworth admitted that as events had turned out the use of the hosepipe was a mistake.

A number of legal points affecting the duties and rights of visiting justices were raised and argued by Mr. Hewart and Sir William Cobbett.

JUDGMENT RESERVED

Judge Parry finally said that several of these points were so important that he would reserve judgment until January 19.

3. “Miss Davison Wins Her Case,” Votes for Women, January 21, 1910

All those who care for the elementary principles of humanity will be glad to know that the disgraceful outrage inflicted upon a defenceless woman in Manchester Gaol has received legal condemnation. We announced last week that in the action brought by Miss Davison against the visiting justices for ordering the hosepipe to be turned on her in Strangeways Gaol, Manchester, judgment had been reserved. On Wednesday morning Judge Parry delivered his judgment, awarding damages to the amount of 40s and costs on the higher scale. Thus the illegal character of the action of the Justices has been pilloried, and we are confident that the public will add to this judgment the censure of public opinion. We note that at the annual meeting of the Manchester City Justices Mr. Johnston referred to the use of the hosepipe as “cruel and barbarous.”


When we went to press last week we were only in possession of the bare facts of the judgment of Judge Parry in the case where Miss Davison and Walter Butterworth, George Hahnlo, Hugh Howarth, and Arthur Haworth, visiting justices at Strangeways Gaol, for ordering the hose pipe to be turned on her in her cell. We are now in possession of a fuller report, which we print on p. 283. From this it will be seen that Judge Parry decided against the justices on the technical issue and held that the use of the hose-pipe was an assault, an unnecessary assault, and an unjustifiable assault. It was for the justices
altogether ultra vires." Judge Parry showed clearly that he appreciated the political character of Miss Davison's action. He said, "The plaintiff's conduct in gaol was deliberately and for a set purpose directed towards the annoyance of those in charge of her. One may admit that this was not done merely from a desire to irritate, but from a wider motive," and he went on to speak of Mr. Conroy, who suggested the use of the hose-pipe, saying, "He may have thought that a drop of cold water was the best cure for what in his out-of-date mind I have no doubt he regarded as a form of hysteria." We also print on page 283 the leading article from the Manchester Guardian dealing with the case. We call special attention to the following extract:—

But there has shown itself of late a tendency to treat women who offend in this way especially in public meetings, with a certain degree of retaliatory violence, as though the fact that they are women were in itself an extreme aggravation of their offence and anything might be done to them. It is a sort of recrudescence of the sentiments which once found expression in the scold's bridle and the ducking-stool. Against this tendency it is the business of all responsible people to set themselves. We do not for a moment contend that women who break the law and commit wanton offenses against person or property are to expect to escape punishment on the ground of sex or of motive, but inasmuch as most or all of them are acting under a sense of public wrong it is all the more important in dealing with them to give no sort of ground for an added sense of personal wrong...  

JUDGE PARRY ON DAMAGES

"The plaintiff's conduct in gaol was deliberately and for a set purpose directed towards the annoyance of those in charge of her. One may admit that this was not done merely from a desire to irritate, but from a wider motive. The particular officials who have to suffer from the plaintiff's conduct seem to have acted with every discretion and kindness. Mr. Conroy, the fons et origo of all the trouble, seemed to be an old-fashioned type of Englishman, who may have thought a 'drop of cold water' the best cure for what in his out-of-date mind I have no doubt he regarded as a form of hysteria. But it is clear that the hosepipe was at the moment used and intended by the defendants to prevent injury to the prisoner in the breaking down of the door, and not from any ulterior motives. It was used for two minutes, and has had no evil

8. Beyond their powers.
result on the plaintiff’s health. On the contrary, it had, it appears, the result of releasing her from prison, a result on which both she and her gaolers are equally to be congratulated. The plaintiff has had the satisfaction of spurring the visiting justices to a momentary indiscretion, of providing herself with ‘copy’ for a vivacious and entertaining account of the affair in the Press, and advertising a cause in which she and many others are greatly interested. Under these circumstances the damages should be nominal, and I assess them at 40s. The costs will be on the C (the highest) scale, as the case is of importance to visiting justices."

Between this incident and her second notorious imprisonment Davison was arrested and imprisoned on many occasions. She was no stranger either to the prison system, which she critiqued in an extended analysis after her release in 1912, or to the London Metropolitan Police, as her essay (p. 169) shows. Davison was able to use the close watch the police kept on suffragettes to her own purposes. Her descriptions of the various officers, wardresses, and court facilities bespeak easy familiarity, which in turn suggests a degree of appropriation—they held no terrors for her, and so she treated them as part of the furniture of her life. But the spring imprisonment in Holloway following her arson campaign would prove to be an entirely different kind of thing, worse than any previous suffering she had endured in prison. The story begins with a brief press account.

5. “One Woman’s Incendiary Campaign and its Result: Miss Davison,” Votes for Women, December 22, 1911

At Bow Street, on Friday afternoon, Miss Emily Wilding Davison, B.A. of Coram Street, Russell Square, was charged with putting a lighted paper into a pillar-box. Detective Inspector Powell said he saw her walk up to the letterbox just outside Parliament Street Post Office. Her back was to him, but she appeared to be striking a match. He rushed up and found she held a packet containing a piece of linen saturated with paraffin. It was alight, and she was endeavouring to force it through the aperture of the letter box. He took her into custody. She said: “Mr. Powell, do you know that I set fire to two in the City this morning? One was a pillar-box in the middle of Leadenhall Street, on the pavement. It burned, as what I put in was well alight. The other was a pillar-box facing the Mansion House. I confess that I set fire to a post-office

9. Certain suffragettes were under surveillance by the Metropolitan Police, presumably those thought to be most likely to commit militant acts.
at 43, Fleet Street, on Friday last, and went to a policeman, 185 City, to be arrested.” She added: “I did this entirely on my own responsibility.”

Miss Davison was remanded for a week, and her case will come up again. As is typical with Davison’s seemingly impulsive actions, a long, logical trail of events culminated in her decision to selectively set fire to a number of pillar [post] boxes in the City of London. Here is how it began in Davison’s own words in an unpublished narrative, almost a short story, composed with her instinct for detail that helps create a vivid sense of her experiences. Recounting her adventures, she controls the narrative much as she controlled the militant actions she performed, turning breaking the law into a series of adventures designed to court arrest. As is the case with all her holograph texts, what is illegible is indicated by ellipses and what is unclear by [?].

6. “Incendiarism” (1911), holograph manuscript in Emily Davison’s hand

A great protest was made on November 21 [1911] by the W.S.P.U. against Mr. Asquith’s announced intention to bring in a Manhood Suffrage Bill in 1912, and his further expression of opinion that Woman Suffrage could be added as an amendment to that bill if the House so wished, but refusing to put it into the Bill himself, as part of the government measure. This was unpardonable, it was the last straw. The women held a demonstration in Parliament Square which developed into a wholesale smashing of the windows in Whitehall, the Strand, some West-End establishments and two newspaper offices. As a result arrests were made, and had to be taken at Bow Street day by day for three weeks. Sixteen of the cases were put to the Session, as the damage done was over L5. Amongst the others were Lady Constance Lytton and Mary Leigh. The former who had done well over L5’s worth, was only charged with doing it to the value of L3.17s.5d. [?] and was treated most indulgently, in the court by Muskett[10] and given a fortnight’s imprisonment. Mary Leigh also had done nothing but defaced a [?] was [next line hard to read] . . . system of as one of the most troublesome of the [?] and given two months. This made my blood boil. The injustice and snobbery was so great. However I thought that something would be done to avenge it. Nothing was done, and I resolved to take it upon myself to make a protest. This couldn’t be done at once, as I was engaged in secretarial work. But soon I resolved to stake all. On December 1st, 1911 I gave notice [p. 2] to leave and began laying my plans. I resolved

that this time damage should be done that could not be repaired. The next step to window breaking was incendiarism. On December 8th, when I was free, at lunch time I walked down the Strand to Fleet Street. When I arrived at the Fleet Street P.O. which faces Fetter Lane I calmly stopped at the big open mouthed receptacle for London letters, I took out of my pocket a packet of the same size as an ordinary letter. It was of grease-proof paper tied with cotton. Inside was some linen well soaked in kerosene. One corner of the paper was torn so as to let out the kerosene rag ready. To this I calmly applied a match, which I had struck on a box of matches, and held it for a second. A small boy was passing by and stopped short on seeing what I was doing. I let the packet, now well alight, go down the receptacle, and threw the matches afterwards. I then quietly walked down Fleet Street and turned into the first Lyons I came to get lunch. My heart was beating rapidly, as I felt the boy might have given [?] of me, and also I did not know what would happen. After I had sat there a short time (about 10 to 15 minutes) I heard a long shrill whistle. This was followed by others, and still others. They were not cab whistles, they were too agitated for that, they were clearly police whistles. About 10 or so of these sounded, and I thought to my self that [p. 3] my object was accomplished and the letters now well alight. When I had finished lunch I went down Fleet Street . . . into Fetter Lane. There I at once saw an oily [?] constable being spoken to by a plain clothes man. The thought at once flashed into my mind that the latter was instructing the former to keep his eye on the pillar box near. I turned down Fetter Lane towards Fleet Street when I saw facing me the P.O. I saw the telegraph boys looking at the very aperture down which I had thrown my packet and matches after. I rejoiced greatly, as taken into consideration with the other two [?] I observed that I had succeeded.

The next day I scanned the papers to see if there was any sign of the authorities looking for the perpetrator of the deed. That day I occupied myself with finding out the various penalties to which I was liable. I found that setting fire to buildings was an offence which rendered the person liable to heavy imprisonment up to penal servitude. But setting fire to post offices or pillar boxes or attempting to do so, meant a penalty not exceeding one year.

On the Sunday I occupied myself with putting my house in order, and with writing two print letters to the Press informing them that I had done the deed, that I expected the authorities were looking for the offender, and that I meant to give myself [p. 4] on Monday at 10:30, by walking up to the constable nearest to the Fleet Street P.O. and giving myself up to him. These
letters I posted in a pillar box near St. Paul’s, and then went in to service there. The service was curiously impressive, it was a Sunday in Advent and all was very solemn, and the sermon was to the fact that a glorious morning awaited the people of God.11

On Monday I set out ready. I walked to Fleet Street. When I got near the P.O. I saw numbers of men, evidently pressmen, about. I walked up to City 185 [badge number] and said to him, “constable, I set fire to this P.O. at 1:15 last Friday, and am ready to surrender myself. He said to me, “I know of nothing—I cannot arrest you.” Then “I should not think of giving you such an advertisement for your cause. You are qualifying for Colney Hatch.”12

Seeing I could do nothing with him, I walked into the Post Office, and asked for the Manager. They took me into the Lady Superintendent. She denied all knowledge of any such deed, and asked for my name and address, which I promptly refused her. Seeing that public authorities did not mean to prosecute, I walked away. Later on I phoned up the Press and explained what had happened.

The thought now in my mind was that I must carry out the protest so strongly that it could not be ignored. I laid my plans accordingly. On Monday night I did not go back to my rooms, but [p. 5] but on Tuesday night I did. There waiting for me was a detective whom I at once detected. He was standing near my house and when I appeared he walked along parallel to me stopped and saw me go [?] in, and was there when I emerged a few minutes later. Now I thought of doing my protest on Wednesday night. Accordingly on leaving the place where I spent the day, I spent time dodging and . . . to make sure that I was not followed and then went off to some friends. I found that Wednesday night would not be a good time for my deed, and so resolved to do it on Thursday.

On Thursday morning I took a train to London. I got out in the city and walked Citywards, buying a box of matches as [?] I had six packets in my pockets. I meant to do as many pillar boxes which were easier to do undiscovered as were necessary, and then to go . . . a Post Office in some very public place to be careful all fell out as I had arranged.

My first good chance occurred in Leadenhall Street. Half-way down it, going towards Aldgate, there is on the right hand side a large pillar box, on the pavement. This was an excellent chance as the mouth was round out of sight.

11. One more reference to the Advent theme, of a new dawn which runs throughout Davison’s writing.
12. A colloquial way of saying she must be mad; Colney Hatch, a lunatic asylum.
I coolly took out a packet, lit it, held it a moment, and put it into the London [2] mouth. I noted that [2] pillar box would not be cleared for half an hour. Very much pleased I walked [here a large ink stain obscures rest of sentence]

Then came into the Aldgate District and walked about there some time but decided to do nothing as the people [p. 6] were all of the poorer class. I . . . at last to the Mansion House. In the wall of what I think is Poulney, facing the Mansion House and . . . Webb is a pillar box let into the wall. I took out a packet, lit it alight. It flared up most splendidly, so that a man coming towards me saw it. He stopped and [?] most amazed, I feared might give me away to a police officer standing near by . . . I also thought that probably he would be busy and not anxious to waste his time going to charge me and having to spend perhaps several days at police courts. My surmise proved to be right. I walked quietly up Cheapside. I saw a Putney Bus on the other side, crossed over, into it and went west. I went inside and for some time did not feel comfortable for as the bus moved slowly. But when I got to Holborn I climbed up on top and began to enjoy myself.

It was a lovely day. I got down at Hyde Park Corner and then walked to Harrods, and near there I entered a Post Office, and phoned up the London News Office as usual. They answered. I told them I was the Suffragette who sent letters to them on Monday. They were at once interested. I told them that I had made up my mind not to be done, that I had that morning fired two pillar boxes in the City . . . [stain makes writing illegible] . . . that I next intend to do a Post Office . . . [ink stain] asked them which they thought would be best to do it . . . [stain] G.P. O. or Parliament Street [?]. They very agitatedly said they could not possibly give advice. [p. 7] Feeling amused and seeing the truth of this, for they would otherwise have been accessories to my act, I answered, 'Of course not I ought to have thought of that! Well! I shall do my deed to be caught at one or the other between 1 and 2 o'clock,' then rang off.

I then went and had a good lunch at Slater's [?] near Knightsbridge and dawdled the time between 12 and 1 o'clock. At 1 o'clock I sallied forth. It was a glorious day and I walked to Hyde Park Corner. I looked at the clock. Time seemed to be going on, so I took a bus to Trafalgar Square. There I got down and took another bus down Whitehall. My reason for doing this was that if I walked down I might be spotted by detectives who would probably be on the look out for me and who might prevent me doing anything at all. As I had said to the Press, I wished to be caught 'in the act.' My bus stopped at Bridge Street. I got down. As I turned into Parliament Street, [?] I first came across Superintendent Wells, who looked at me curiously. I then came right
facing Inspector Powell and Constable City 185, both in private clothes. They looked at me, but I was glad they were coming towards me, as they could not turn too ostentatiously. I however went on past them up to the Post Office. I stood there, and quickly took out of my pocket one of my kerosene packets, struck a match and lit it deliberately and put it in. That did not burn well, and I was not yet arrested, so I took out another and even more ostentatiously set it alight [p. 8] and tried to put it into the letter box. By this time Powell had seen what I was up to. He reached forward literally grabbed the thing out of my hand, blew it out, seized me violently and said, 'I knew you would do this, Miss Davison.' On 185 City seized me on the other side and they rushed me into Cannon Row Police Station. As we went I called out, 'I am arrested, friends.' They hastily led me along into Scotland Yard into Powell's own room, others following. There they took down particulars of me, and I told them that I had done two in the City first that morning. Looking uneasy, they asked me where. I said I would willingly describe the position of the two, and did so. They then went off to ask what the Post Office authorities wanted done, and I had a long chat with Powell, during which we discussed old events. After about ½ an hour I was taken over to Cannon Row where several inspectors crowded around me who remembered me. One of them said, 'We have been quite expecting to see you in the House of Commons again.' I replied: 'Yes, I know you have,' having often "detected the detectives" watching me.' Another asserted that they had heard that I was married and "had given it all up." Presently they read a charge to me of putting matches and lighted matter into a Pillar-box in Parliament Street, and then took me off [p. 9] in a taxi cab with Mrs. Parson, the Matron, Inspector Powell and a Post Office Official. Arrived at Bow Street I was taken into the Matron's room, and found a strange one there. She was proved to be the sister of the one I knew. My case came on about 4 o'clock or so, before Sir Albert de Rutzen. 13 I had heard it was Mr. Mershame [?], and was surprised when I saw the other. Powell read out the charges against me. When Sir Albert heard [?] them he said: 'Do you think the woman is in her right mind.' Powell replied, 'I believe so; she has been convicted many previous times.' He also said he might have [?] charges to bring up against me. Sir Albert then remanded me for a week to be kept 'under observation.' I was then taken back to the Matron's room, and by this time the gaoler had promised . . . through to my friends. In an incred-

13. The Bow Street Magistrate at the time, whom Sylvia Pankhurst described as memorable for his "half-shut eyes" which reminded her of a tortoise (The Suffragette Movement, 433).
ibly short time two arrived whose numbers I had given, very dear old friends in the cause, and with them a young fellow, also devoted to the cause. They got tea in to me. I told one to get some luggage I had left ready, and to send it up to Holloway that night. Presently it was time to go in old Black Maria. I begged to be put near the door, and was [ink stain] I drove out of the yard my three friends cheered me, and I waved my handkerchief.

The odd incident of the old drive north was that the constable in the van turned out to be the very one with whom I driven just a year ago to Holloway in Election time. We went [?] again[?] first to Pentonville to let a wretched looking boy out, [p. 10] and I and another woman only were left. I asked her what she was in for [?]. She told me. It was the usual charge 'soliciting', and she declared to me she had not been doing it. She looked a refined girl and spoke [?] with an educated voice. I said that I know that many of these cases were 'engineered' by the police to get conviction.

When we arrived at Holloway I [?] first got out and was taken into the reception ward, but they did not seem to know what to do with me. As I was waiting in the courtyard, my constable and I had a further chat. He said to me, 'You have only to breathe the word Suffragette here for them to be terrified out of their wits.' I laughed and replied that we had won this respect by sheer fighting and he replied that he knew. By that time they had made up their mind and took me off to the Remand / Hospital wing. Before I was put in my cell the Matron came to see me. We had a long chat about Strangeways (from which she has been [ink stain] to Holloway), and then she put me into a cell.

This cell was large and airy (as the Matron carefully pointed out to me). It has a very fairly decent bed in [ink stain] it and decent wash-stand. It was next door but one to the one in which Mrs. Pankhurst had been in October–December, 1908. During my week there I had a very good time. I had hot water brought me in a basin in [p. 11] the morning, quite decent food, including fish and a pudding at mid day. Besides this I went to chapel service with the other Suffragettes. I had long chats with Mary Leigh. I also to my joy had a Suffragette next-door to me, who was a splendid companion. I was able to write 3 letters a day, and after a day or two got plenty of papers, and visits. In short I had the treatment which we all ought to have as political prisoners. I pointed this out to a visiting magistrate, who came in to see us at exercise on the Tuesday.

My next-door neighbour went out Monday, and like a regular comrade,
went and looked after my . . . A newly formed society—The Men's Society for Women's Rights—on hearing that even a breath of suspicion had been raised against my sanity, determined to stand by me through thick and thin. Curiously, [?] a brother of mine, to whom I had written, came to see me and tell me that he would get his own solicitor to defend me. I was pleased and surprised.

At last December 21st arrived. It was a freezing wet day. I hauled my baggage along and got in a growler14 with two wardresses. We drove to Bow Street. We arrived punctually at 10 o'clock. I passed into the Matron's room. It was my old friend this time, who gave me a hearty welcome. [p. 12] Presently my good prison-comrade arrived to take charge of me, with some violets and white heather, and all kinds of nice things. Then my counsel and solicitor came in. We had a little consultation. I explained to them what I wanted done. My counsel, who was a firm Suffragist, understood at once. I knew he understood, for he confessed to me that he was always terribly worried on such occasions, for as a lawyer he wanted to get his client off, as a Suffragist he did not want to minimize the offence. Others arrived of my good friends, and soon after noon we went into court. I looked round to see the Court well filled with Suffragist friends. I saw a poor woman whom I did not know nod to me and say 'Cheer up.' I made signs to her that I was all right and smiled at my comrades.

The case proceeded. No . . . was made of my sanity. (I learned later that my counsel saw the letter which Sir Albert de Rutzen had received from the Prison Doctor to the effect that I was perfectly all right.) Powell gave his evidence and read my statements. My counsel put several very clear questions to him which brought out the fact that Powell had not been very accurate in his statements, for he declared that I was hiding from the public what I was doing. [p.13] whereas my counsel obliged [him] to practically confess that I was not hiding it. P.C. 185 was also called, and the postman who sorted the Fleet Street bag on December 8th, who produced two packets found in the bag. The postman at Parliament Street was also called, and he testified to finding nothing in the bag, and gave evidence when he cleared the box. Then I was asked if I wished to say anything. I said I would like to make a statement and Sir Albert de Rutzen, after warning me that it would be used against me, told me to proceed. I began, but found I had to go very slowly, as the prosecutor

was taking it down, and could only write longhand. He probably thought that would put me out, but it did not. Very slowly, loudly and clearly I said the following:

Written separately from this narrative, in a much more formal version of her writing:

Gentlemen of the Jury,
I stand here for justice, although I feel that it is impossible to expect perfect justice in a court where every single official person from the judge to the public is composed of men only. Nevertheless I consider that I have a better chance of justice here where I am tried before 'ir good men and true,' than in the courts where I have been lately tried where the prisoner could neither hear nor be heard, and where he was tried by a judge who was not in the most complete possession of his faculties. I mean no disrespect to English police courts but it seems to me that just as the country insists upon being served by men who are in their prime in the army and navy, so too it should be served by men in their prime in the administration of justice.

You have already heard the reasons why I felt bound to adopt this strong course. They were both cases of injustice, one a particular one, the other a general one. The particular one was the case of a great difference being made in an English court between a woman of humble birth, and a woman of high birth. The other case, the general case, I had in mind to try to prevent England committing one of the greatest examples of injustice which have ever sullied her annals. I mean that all the males of the country should be endowed with the franchise, whilst not a single woman [F] was enfranchised, or if enfranchised was to be so endowed in a back-stairs way. Such an injustice would be flagrant, and would slur not only on the women, but on the men, who would be insulted by the refusal to treat their mothers as free women. This could not be tolerated and I trust will be avoided.

Then as to the act itself! Ever since the militant agitation began it is the women who have suffered violence on their bodies as a result of their demand for justice. At first they submitted, but as the violence grew worse and worse they realized that it was...
submit to this violence, for the women are the gates of life to the nation, and it was therefore tantamount to murder to allow the violence to go on from worse to worse. Hence the women rather than submit to it, preferred to use violence to property in order to avoid it. They first damaged Government property and you took no notice. They later damaged the property of the private citizen. But that could be repaired. And the [2] bodies of the women often could not be repaired. Three of my comrades have died for the violence inflicted on them on Nov. 18, 1910. I read in the papers the other day that the soul and honor of a girl child of 9 was valued in an English court of law at 30 pieces of silver. The reference is obvious to you. I felt that I must do damage that could not be repaired.

Now as to the form which my protest took. It has been misrepresented to you here. It was an open protest. On Dec. 8th I dropped into the Fleet Street P.O. a pkt of linen saturated in kerosene, having set it alight. I threw my matches in afterwards and was seen by a small boy. I proceeded down Fleet Street and went into a Lyons for lunch—now for 3 proofs that I did something. After 10 minutes or qtr of an hour I heard several police whistles. They were not cab whistles, they were too long and many. On finishing lunch I walked down Fleet Str. and came up by diverse ways into Fetter Lane. There I saw a plain clothes man giving instruction to a constable, it seemed to me about a pillar box nearby. As I came out of Fetter Lane facing the Fleet Str. P.O. I saw 2 telegraph boys looking down the very aperture down which I had thrown my missive. Yet at first it was denied that anything was done. [in pencil above this line: "yet afterwards I was charged with this"] As to the second case I determined to do two pillar boxes in the City which I accomplished. I then warned the press that I would do one to be publicly taken, and did so. Otherwise nothing would have been known.

Now as to motive, it was purely political—(Here interrupted by Recorder to say that did not concern Jury). Very well. I will keep to the question of guilt. Although technically you may find me guilty, morally I am not. The moral guilt lies upon you the citizens of this country, who stand aside from the fight for the liberties of this country, and merely force the women to make protests how and where they may. We are . . . this country cannot possibly be genuinely
democratic till the women, your mothers and sisters, stand side by side with you. Therefore the moral guilt lies upon you. I stand for the justice which you deny us. [this last sentence written in pencil.]

In address to judges in mitigation of sentence. I pressed the question of political motive said 3 things (a) to be allowed to pursue a vocation (2) not to be required to do prison tasks (?) and he able to keep . . . (c) to be allowed paper and letters, books, etc. . . . Pointed out I would and write book and asked to do so . . .

After I had finished the old prosecutor began to read it through. He mumbled faintly, so in a very loud voice I called to him to speak up. He looked sick and [ink stain] . . . 'shout if you like!' All through this trial and other trials I had been struck by the shocking [triple underlining] acoustic properties of the Court, also by the way all the officials mumble from Sir Albert de Rutzen himself to the rest. Sometimes it seemed as if they did not mean the prisoner or public to hear, but this struck me as particularly unfair.

The old man mumbled on. When he came to the word 'decided' he apparently could not read his own writing and hesitated as to whether it was 'deceive' or what . . . in a very loud clear voice I told him it was 'decided' and spelt it to him 'd-e-c-i-d-ed.' At this the court tittered and the gaoler beside me [stain obscures this next word]. At another point I pulled him up for turning (?) two sentences into one, saying . . . loudly: 'A full stop is wanted there, please . . . the court was tickled. [this paragraph is stained all the way through the middle]

By the way, when I made use of the expression 'incendiariism' in my statement, Sir Albert de Rutzen pulled me up, saying, 'One moment' (then addressing Mr. Cooper) 'is it at your advice that the prisoner is speaking?' Mr. Cooper, obviously ill at ease replied that he would rather answer that question in private. Then Sir Albert de Rutzen said 'I understand that she is proceeding on her own idea,' and [of] Mr. Cooper that he [was] not able to prevent my speaking. [lots crossed out in this paragraph and clearly words missing in her haste]

That bold statement of mine no doubt decided Sir Albert de Rutzen. He announced that the case must go to the assizes, Mr. Cooper said he could not oppose that. [stain] . . . asked that I should be allowed bail Sir Albert seemed very unwilling to allow bail, but on
being pressed said he would accept my own recognisances for £500, and two sureties for £250 each. I heard this to my great relief when I was hustled out of the Court. Afterward I learned that my counsel had the private interview with Sir Albert, who seemed very worried as to whether he had done right to let me out on bail. My answer reassured him on this point and [he?] was to see a letter from the prison doctor stating that I was quite 'compos mentis.'

I went back to the Matron's room. My bail could not be settled up till the Court (which had adjourned for lunch) was sitting again and Inspector Powell could be present to accept the securities. All my friends came crowding in to see me and congratulate me. I was able to cordially thank my counsel and solicitor, and to learn who were to be my sureties. It was quite a joyous levee. My good friend, who had been my prison comrade for a short time and had moved heaven and earth on my behalf was there too with an excellent lunch which she had brought into . . . After some minutes conversations it was decided that most of them should retire for lunch somewhere near the court, leaving me to eat mine with my faithful friend.

The Court was not to sit again till 3 o'clock. Just before then Inspector Powell strolled in, and we had an amusing three-cornered discussion, which went on for some time. At close on 4 o'clock, then I was beginning to wonder why I was still waiting for bail, one of my other friends came rushing into the matron's room with a declaration of joy and surprise at seeing this detective. 'We have been hunting and enquiring for you everywhere!' she cried. 'They were going to clear us out of the court' but we refused to go till you were bailed (turning to me). They told us you were not here (to Powell). The others came pouring in and everyone was very indignant at the way they had been misled. We too were indignant that we should have been the unwilling instruments of the delay. A little while longer and it would have been too late to get me out on bail that night, and I should have been whisked away to Holloway. Then the bail would have been harder to arrange. In these matters Suffragettes have not been fairly treated, but it was Suffragette persistence which won the day, for my comrades had also refused to budge till I was released.

The ceremony of bail was soon carried out! I went through a passage with my two sureties, and undertook on my own recognisances of £500 to be present at the Old Bailey on January 10th, 1912, at 10:30
a.m., whilst my sureties each supported me to the tune of £250, and I walked out of the court to temporary liberty.

After a joyous confabulation with my friends, I went off to spend two nights with one of my comrades, and next evening I started to go North to spend most of my short space of liberty with my dear mother. I was [p. 18] anxious as it was possible that I might be afterwards detained for some time at 'his Majesty's pleasure.'


Emily Davison was convicted and sentenced to six and a half months in Holloway prison. She emerged considerably chastened by her experiences, more brutal and more unfair than she anticipated, but she emerged fighting, and ultimately triumphant, for her protests against what she suffered enlisted the support of major medical and political figures and directed a good deal of negative publicity toward the government. A strong believer in personal sacrifice for both a noble cause and one's friends, she was rewarded by knowledge that her suffering was not without purpose or effect. The editors of The Suffragette viewed Davison's actions and trials in Holloway as the prelude to her action at the 1913 Derby when she stepped out onto the race track and for this reason they published this statement on the anniversary of her death. Written after her release, the narrative begins in Holloway in late May or early June 1912. Votes for Women introduced it saying,

The following statement, written by Miss Emily W. Davison after her release from Holloway on Friday, June 28, 1912, will have a special interest for all those who know how intense was her conviction that only by a great tragedy would the cause of women's enfranchisement be won. Because her comrades were being tortured in prison she felt impelled to make the protest described

15 Dr. Mansell Moulin, Emily Davison's personal physician, wrote scathing rebuttals of the government's contention that forcible feeding was safe in the July 1912 issues of Votes for Women, and the topic continued to claim attention well into 1913. In a March 7, 1913, Votes for Women article, "Forcible Feeding Scandal," Dr. Elizabeth Garrett Anderson described it as "indefensible from a medical standpoint, and an outrage from a human one" and in the same issue Dr. Mansell Moulin wrote of the practice, "In the course of a few days it brings a person who is certified as perfectly able to stand it, absolutely to death's door."
in her own words below. There can be no doubt that the same conviction led her to make the supreme protest which has resulted in her death.

We were anxiously waiting the result of the Conspiracy Trial.¹⁶ Then the leaders demanded to be put in the first division. We waited for the result. The news came at last that a small measure of justice had been won, and we lost the precious privilege of their presence. But at once we made our demand for similar treatment. We resolved, as usual, to give every opportunity for Constitutional pressure to win justice. For over a week we waited, every day asking for the Governor and demanding that we should be transferred to the first division, clearly warning him that if all other methods failed we should adopt the hunger-strike. The day before we did this we gave him a twenty-four hours’ ultimatum, and then began our fight, strictly to time.

On Wednesday, June 19 from 10 a.m. onwards, we were kept in solitary confinement.

On Saturday morning we decided that most of us would barricade our cells after they had been cleaned out. At ten o’clock on the Saturday a regular siege took place in Holloway. On all sides one heard crowbars, blocks and wedges being used, men battering doors with all their might. The barricading was always followed by the sounds of human struggle, suppressed cries of the victims, groans, and other horrible sounds. These sounds came nearer and nearer in my direction. My turn came. I fought like a demon at my door, which was forced open with crowbars till at last enough room was made for one of the besiegers to get in. He pulled open the door, and in came wardresses and a doctor. I protested loudly that I would not be fed by the junior doctor, and tried to dart out into the passage; then I was seized by about five wardresses, bound into the chair, still protesting; and they accomplished their purpose. They threw me on my bed, and at once locked the door and went off to the next victim.

I lay like a log for some time. When I did recover a little, I got up and smashed out the remaining panes of my window, then lay down again until I was able to get out into the corridor. In my mind was the thought that some desperate protest must be made to put a stop to the hideous torture which was now being our lot. Therefore, as soon as I got out I climbed on to the rail-

¹⁶. Of Emmeline Pankhurst and other officers of the WSPU, see chapter 1, p. 30. For the documents of the case, see Cheryl Jorgensen-Earp. Speeches and Trials of the Militant Suffragettes, May 17–22, 1912.
ing and threw myself out on to the wire-netting, a distance of between 20 and 30 feet. The idea in my mind was "one big tragedy may save many others"; but the netting prevented any severe injury. The wardress in charge ran forward in horror. She tried to get me off the netting and whistled for help. Three others came and tried their best to induce me to go into my cell. I refused.

After a time their suspicions were allayed, and the matron came through into the ward to visit some of the prisoners; while she was there the wardresses relaxed their watch, and I began to look again. I realized that my best means of carrying out my purpose was the iron staircase. When a good moment came, quite deliberately I walked upstairs and threw myself from the top, as I meant, on to the iron staircase. If I had been successful I should undoubtedly have been killed, as it was a clear drop of 30 to 40 feet. But I caught once more on the edge of the netting. A wardress ran to me, exostulating, and called on two of my comrades to try and stop me. As she spoke I realized that there was only one chance left, and that was to hurl myself with the greatest force I could summon from the netting on to the staircase, a drop of about 10 feet. I heard someone saying, "No surrender!" and I threw myself forward on my head with all my might. I know nothing more except a fearful thud on my head. When I recovered consciousness, it was to a sense of acute agony. Voices were buzzing around me; in the distance someone said, "Fetch the doctor," Someone tried to move me, and I called out, "Oh, don't!" Then the doctor came, and asked for me to be moved to a cell close by. They lifted me as gently as possible, but the agony was intense. It was all I could do to keep from screaming. And then I was placed on the cell bed. After a moment the doctor examined me, moving me as little as possible. He asked me to go to hospital, but I begged him to leave me there—which he did. I also managed to say, "For heaven's sake, don't feed me, because I shall fight." I was therefore left very quietly, and they brought me some water, and did all they could for me.

The first night was one of misery, as I had to lie on my back, although it hurt me to do so. There was no sleep. Next day I at once demanded that the Governor should allow me to have my own doctor to examine me. I said, "If you feed me before examination, it will be at your own risk." The Governor asked me why I had done my deed, and I told him I thought that one big tragedy would save the others. His hand trembled, and he promised that he would see into the matter.

I was left alone until about two o'clock, when a specialist came in with the prison doctors. He thoroughly examined me, and seemed very much struck
with my injuries. Afterwards Dr. Sullivan confessed to me that he thought I had had the most extraordinary escape.

To my amazement, the doctors came to forcibly feed me that afternoon. The operation, throughout which I struggled, caused me such agony that I begged the three comrades who were released that afternoon to let friends know outside what was being done.

From that time on they fed me twice a day, in spite of the torture it caused me, until Thursday, when, to our intense relief, they fed us only once. We all said that any food that could have been poured into us in a second operation could not possibly have done us the good that the relief from a second torture did.

Meantime nothing was being done to make my condition better. My head was dressed on Sunday. Nothing further was done to it. By the examination I knew that besides the two injuries to my head the seventh cervical [sic] vertebra was injured, and another at the base of the spine. They seemed very much worried about my right shoulder blade. The sacrum bone was also injured, not to mention the many bruises all over my arms and back. All the vertebrae at the back of the head are very painful, and it is torture to turn.

On Thursday Dr. Sullivan examined me fairly carefully, and asked me to be weighed. I consented, and found that I had lost 4 lb. at least since the Friday when I threw myself over.

I may mention that when I went into Holloway I weighed 9 st. 12½ lb. [138.5 lbs.], and when released I weighed 7 st. 8½ lb. [106.5 lbs.].

On the Thursday evening after the one forcible feeding operation, the doctor opened my cell door and announced the medical inspector. He walked in and was followed by a gentleman who gave his name as Dr. Craig. The three of them sat down in my cell, and subjected me to a long examination and cross-examination. I calmly gave them all the information that I could, and seemed thoroughly to satisfy any doubts they had as to my sanity. In the course of the examination I believe I made them realise what a disgrace it was to England and the medical profession that such torture as forcible feeding should have been resorted to rather than granting justice to women. They weakly put forward the argument that their only mission was to save life, but could not deny that mental torture was hardly the safest way of doing so.

I also made them realise that we women set this great cause of ours before everything else in the world; or, as I put it to them, the cause of human progress was above that of any possible material consideration.

Dr. Craig thoroughly examined all my injuries, seemed greatly impressed
by them, and when he shook hands with me said, “Don’t do any more for your cause; you have done more than enough.”

On the Friday morning Dr. Sullivan examined me again, and told me that I should probably be released that day later on. He said he would not trouble me with the forcible feeding, if when I was released I would take some food before going out. I said, “Oh, no; I absolutely refuse to take any food within the prison walls.” He therefore decided that he must forcibly feed me again, for the ninth time—which was done.

All that day I got no chance of letting my comrades know that I should be released, which they would have been glad of, because they were all very anxious that I should be.

In the afternoon the doctor came and officially announced my release, said that all packing must be done for me, and asked me if, when I was in the cab, I would take some Brand’s Essence. He said that the tin “should not be opened until I was outside, so that I should know it was not contaminated by the Home Secretary.” I smiled and told him that I was willing to take anything once I was outside the walls.

During all the terms of my imprisonments I have been forcibly fed forty-nine times.

8. Emily Davison’s account of her Holloway imprisonment, holograph manuscript in her own hand

The preceding narrative of her experiences in Holloway in the spring of 1912 printed in The Suffragette shortly after Emily Davison’s death, is complemented by this unpublished one in Davison’s own hand among her papers in the Women’s Library archive. Her words were supported and corroborated by Dr. Mansell Moulin in the pages of Votes for Women. More graphically detailed in its description of the procedure of forcible feeding and of pain she endured, this account also references the question of sanity which haunted so many of the suffragettes who feared that the torture they had suffered might have compromised their mental health.

On Saturday, June 22nd, I was fed by force about 11 a.m. I barricaded myself in my cell as strongly as I could but my chair had been taken from me—My barricade was however so effective that men with crowbars had to be fetched to burst the door. I had a big fight at the door, pushing out the crowbars and wedges as fast as they got them in—However at last the two men got their wedges in and then burst the door, and one got in. There outside stood the
junior Dr. and several wardresses. I called out at the top of my voice 'I will not be fed by this doctor, if it must be done, it must be by the Senior Dr.' At the same time I tried to dart out into the corridor but they seized me, and forced me into my cell, brought in the wooden armchair they use on these occasions and after a sharp and fierce struggle, banged [?] me into it. Then they tied my head and body down (inserted between lines: a wardress held each hand down on the arms of the chair) into it very roughly. The Doctor gripped my head and began to force the tube down my nostril. It hurt me very much, as though it were boring anywhere but down the right place. As it passed down behind the throat, a feeling of suffocation and sickness followed augmented by the tube apparently exploring for the right passage. I naturally commenced to cough, choke, and retch. This happened on every occasion. The result was that the tube 'kinked' as the head hospital wardress termed it, in other words, curled around my throat and mouth, gradually [?] coming out of the latter. As a result the doctor would try first one nostril and then the other. On one occasion this happened so often the Senior Dr. (then operating) said 'Miss Davison, you are determined'—I replied in the brief interval as the tube was out: 'I am!' He knew [crossed out: he took it for granted] that I was choking up the tube on purpose (crossed out: As a matter of fact the action was natural and involuntary but I always helped it as much as I could) One day to my delight the tube 'kinked' in this way and actually wound till part of it was outside my mouth. No one noticed this fact and thinking all was well they started pouring the liquid into the funnel, it of course ran out on to the towel in which I was swathed. I felt very proud of that—when . . . [it] went down (crossed out: at last got down the feeling was), sometimes it seemed as if it went into the wrong place. But as I wriggled (above the line: probably) and looked specially suffocated they then brought it up. I wondered when that happened if they had put it in the wrong passage, and what would result. When it went down the proper place the feeling of retching and suffocation was unbearable. The Dr. would often tell me to 'swallow' which I (crossed out: fought) of course did not do. Instead I was glad to be sick which often happened, and the rejected fluid went on the Dr.'s hands, to his disgust and my satisfaction. It was very much more trying to be fed by the Junior Dr. as he was so unskilful [sic] and at first made jeering remarks, which later however after a day or two he did not indulge in. When the job was over whilst I was still retching, the wardresses untied me and threw me on to my bed, then left me at once and shut the door. I was generally too exhausted and overcome to do anything but lie like a log [sic] for some time, often retching
and coughing for an hour or so (crossed out: a long time) afterwards. After that fall I was not fed by force on Sat. afternoon or Sunday morning... to my demand the Governor on Sunday morning to be allowed to have my own Dr. (Mr. Mansell-Moulin) to examine me before anything was done. A specialist (I since learned Dr. Crisp [2]) came to examine me at about 2 p.m. Although dissatisfied at not seeing my own Dr. I gave him all assistance in my power to examine me. I noticed that he was a long time examining me, and looked very grave. He left my cell without giving me any idea of my condition, but Dr. Sullivan confessed to me next day, that the Specialist like himself thought that I had had a very narrow escape. He would not tell me more. At about 4 pm that Sunday to my amazement they came to feed me by force. I had clearly warned them that whatever happened I should resist. I was so little expecting them that I was quietly lying in bed, and so quickly did they come on me that I had no time to get out of bed. I cried out saying 'you surely are not such brutes as to feed me by force when I am so ill!' They merely answered by seizing me and pinning me down on the... All the time I suffered the greatest agony from my aching head and back but there was no pity shown. I cried at and after the operation. Shortly after I heard that three of my comrades were released without being forcibly fed and were going. They came to the cell door to say good bye and I called out to them to let friends outside know what was happening to me. Meantime I spent a night of torture with my head and back. Next day and Tuesday I was forcibly fed twice a day, always fighting and protesting. The custom was to try and rush in on me to surprise me in bed. As a result the minute I heard the key in the door I would jump out of bed in spite of pain and rush to hold on to the shelf, without time even to put on my slippers. Sometimes, to avoid this I would get out, put my shoes on, and stand in the cold to avoid being surprised. I then had a tussle with the wardress, who would finally bang me into the hard wooden chair into which no cushion was put to save my back. I cried out repeatedly that my back was being hurt, when they would tell me that I should not struggle. On one occasion the cloth round my neck was tied so tight that I thought I should be choked. As the last stage of my struggle was bending forward low to avoid the Doctor; the misery (interline: and pain) I suffered can be well guessed. In addition to all this I suffered acute indigestion from the amount of liquid they poured down me. Each time on Tuesday I was very sick afterwards. I therefore asked for the Doctor to see me before feeding me on Weds. Morning. When he came in I told him about the indigestion, and asked him
either to give me less each time, or only to feed me once a day. He said that others had been making similar complaints and that he was going to try the effect of only feeding us once a day on a more concentrated diet. This he did on Wednesday and Thursday to our great relief. We told him that the mental relief was incalculable. All this time we had been in close confinement in our cells, but owing to the remarks of several of our women, notably [interlinear: the nurse] Miss Hudson, those who were strong enough were allowed about an hour’s exercise for the first time on Wednesday. I was, of course, in bed.

On Thursday afternoon Dr. Sullivan brought in ‘The Medical inspector’ Dr. Smallie, who was followed by a third doctor, whose name was given as Dr. Gray. I surmised that he was a mental specialist, and have since ascertained that this was right. He was very pleasant and courteous. The three doctors sat down in my cell and a long examination and cross-examination followed. I was questioned as to my state of health, whether I had any delusions, fears and fancies. I was quite calm and matter of fact, and I flatter myself stood the severe test well. My injuries also were examined. The only time I got at all roused was when they defended forcible feeding as a means of saving life. I drew their attention to the fact that it was not the only alternative to letting us starve, but indeed was only a means of torture and a contemptible subterfuge for denying justice. I believe I made them realise what an indelible disgrace had been brought by forcible feeding upon England and the medical profession. Next day I received a clean bill as to my sanity by my unconditional release some days before my sentence was up. I was not allowed to do my own packing and was sent to good friends to be nursed up in a taxicab, accompanied by a hospital warden. As I refused to take any food within the prison walls, I was forcibly fed in the morning. I went to bed at once on my arrival at my friend’s house. Next day I was carefully examined by Mr. Mansell-Moulin and Mr. [?] Macaulay. For further details I refer to the report sent by each doctor. The W.S.P.U. has the one and I enclose copy of the other. I am still in bed receiving careful nursing.

JULY 8, 1912

EMILY WILDING DAVIDSON

n.b. This statement should be carefully read and compared for any omission (such as that of my fall) with my statement made on June 29th to Miss Buckner.

17. The Penn-Gaskells.
RECUERATION AND RECOVERY

In the late summer of 1912, while she was still recovering from the cumulative effects of her imprisonment, Emily Davison undertook an extensive writing campaign. The major fruit of this effort was a series of letters she wrote to various newspapers. In addition to those publications, she composed first drafts of a series of unpublished letters and several essays on her experiences as a militant suffragette who had undergone the fullest test of her commitment to the cause. Recorded in two small, brown student exercise books, the drafts are written predominantly in longhand, but sprinkled with shorthand symbols and abbreviations. In these books of “rough papers” she seems to have been working through a series of drafts that could be transformed into published essays. Her writing varies in style and tone, but the consistently emphatic punctuation suggests the depth of feeling behind these compositions. The drafts seem designed not so much to advance suffrage ideas as to shine light on systems and corruption that not only work against women’s suffrage goals, but also against the human spirit.

Emily Davison’s interest in prison reform, undoubtedly rooted in her own experiences, also reflects the topicality of the subject in the pages of Votes for Women during the same period, particularly in the winter of 1912 and spring of 1913. But what she writes in her notebooks is perhaps most noteworthy for the way in which she adopts the mantle of Elizabeth Fry, one of her pioneer women, to engage the larger issue of how the British prison system fails Britain with its waste of human energy and material goods, as well as its failure to address the root causes of the crimes that bring people within its purview. Like her humorous account of the garbled recital of her words in the incendiaryism trial, her essay on the contemporary British prison system is both a critique and a way of recovering autonomy by standing in the position of one who is beyond control of the system to which she has been subjected. In these writings she distances herself from her subject, and while using the first person, writes almost as a third-person narrator, one describing the facts of events but not the feelings.

9. “[Some Defects of our Present] The Prison-System from Within,” holograph manuscript in Emily Davison’s hand

Our present prison-system is altogether wrong, and is only effective where it is not strictly carried out. The real truth of the matter is that the old order is

changing, giving place to a new, but so long as the old system remains even nominally the order of the day so long will no good be achieved. Under the old regime the people were put in prison and no one assumed the slightest responsibility for them. They were thrown into dungeons in which their condition depended upon the state of their purses. In the days before Habebus Corpus a man might even be thrown into prison without just cause being shown or any trial and kept there for years. But if on the one hand no care were taken of the prisoner unless he had a long purse, on the other hand he had no restrictions to his liberty beyond that of remaining within the walls of the prison. He was by no means in solitary confinement, unless he could pay for such solitude and wished for it. He could have what food he could pay for, and what drink and clothing he could pay for, although the position of the penniless prisoner was indeed pitiable in these respects, as practically nothing was provided for him. What the state of the wretched person was we know from the accounts given us by the great prison reformers, Howard and Elizabeth Fry. But there was this much to balance the rest, that if there was little prison discipline there was little to deteriorate the prisoners' character, for if there were genuine gaol-birds in the company, there were also people of decent character who had fallen on evil days and, as a rule when the man or woman was fortunate enough to get out of prison, he or she was not much the worse for the experience, except perhaps physically because of the unsanitary state of the prison . . .

But with the advent of first John Howard and later Elizabeth Fry into the prisons a new state of affairs came into being. For the first time people began to see that the state had another duty beside that of merely getting miscreants out of the way. The two earnest workers first raised the social conscience to the idea that when the unfortunate man or woman was put out of harm's way by society, society found a duty to them. Both reformers clearly foreshadowed the period when the State would begin to realize that prevention is better than cure, hence the later idea has arisen that by means of education and employment a good deal may be done to help the prisoner to rise from his fallen state. The various Prisoners' Aid Societies are also the direct outcome of the work of these two advanced pioneers. But the ideas that they set in motion are only now coming into action. For altho' the effect of their work was, at the beginning of the . . . to arouse a public conscience in the matter . . . awakened energy showed itself in a wrong direction. Instead of working out fully the excellent theory that prevention is better than cure, the part of the doctrine which took hold of the public authorities was that of cure alone. The new ideal was to check crime by drastic measures, by severity. Now even in
such a mis-conception we see some sense of reform at work but it was in the wrong direction. The British character is noted for its conservatism, its slowness to move. When once it is roused to see an evil, this characteristic shows itself by the way the nation tinkers all round the evil for some time before at last it sees that it must go to the source of the evil to remove it effectually. The form then which the new system took was that of making crime as ugly as forbidding and [blank space], as possible. Hence the introduction into our system of a rigid discipline wh. those of us who know the subject know to be almost as great an evil as the former laxity. This showed itself in the buildings, dress, routine, food and discipline of these places. Everything and everybody was to be reduced to one pattern and the uglier that pattern the better. The only redeeming feature of the new code was the introduction of useful work as part of the prison discipline, and that indeed to-day is the only redeeming feature of the present prison code and we owe [?] it to the two prison-reformers. The prisoners acknowledge it themselves. The only part of the [blank space] where they have a choice or a possibility of variety is in the doing of prison-tasks. The result of this is that they are fairly cheerful all through the working week and only feel dull on Sundays, a day which most of them dread in spite of their freedom from tasks and consequent time for reading the prison books.

To take first the question of the construction and general architectural style of our prisons. The greater part of these are very ugly barrack-like buildings with wings mostly radiating from one centre, this no doubt for convenience of communication. With the exception of some older prisons like Holloway, the architecture is of the most hideous description the mere sight of which must make the unlucky man or woman entering them for the first time perhaps unconsciously to re echo the feeling of “abandon hope all ye who enter here.” Now that is just the very feeling wh. ought to be avoided in these places. Despair is the worst feeling to be encouraged in the first offender. What is needed is an education to better things and that can be done by good architecture as well as good other things. Then, too, the inside of the buildings encourages counsels of despair at present. The entrance into long lines of hideous drab coloured wards stretching far away with row upon row of iron doors, long lines of corridors and iron balustrades with the hideously significant wire-netting stretched across between have their due effect. Finally the prisoner after various ceremonials is ushered into his or her own ugly little cell the walls of which are painted white and drab with a narrow band of dark brown paint between and is left to its meager . . . on every bit
of wh. is marked out the broad arrow and to solitary musings. The natural reflection on all these things by the thoughtful cultured prisoner is that it is a mistake to make everything so unilaterally ugly. Why, for example, cannot the restful colour green be more used in the general scheme? Why in the cell, is the prisoner not allowed some few of the ordinary amenities of life? Much improvement has been made in female prisons since the days when Suffragettes first went to prison in the way of washing facilities the vessels used for eating, and the matter of ventilation, but much remains to be done.

Then the question of prison dress requires much attention. Since the days of Howard and Eliz. Fry the use of a prison-garb has become a regular part of the prison discipline. The institution arose from the obvious fact that the clothing of many of those who were imprisoned was not of such a kind that they could continue to wear it in going about their tasks, nor could most of them afford to renew it. It was therefore quite a natural [blank space] that the prison authorities had to provide clothes of some uniform desc. With such a proceeding there is no fault to find, but the mistake lies in the fact that the garments are so unhygienic, badly-made and hideous. Thus for example, the clothes are all made with the most elementary of fastenings and all tie round the waist. The shoes are of the very heaviest and most uncomfortable make. A prisoner is often allowed to go about right down at the heel. The cut of the garments is of the most elementary nature and clumsy to a degree. A young woman with the very neatest of figures looks a hideously shapeless mess in theses garments. Lastly the garments are preeminently hideous, and are warranted to take the pride of neatness and [blank space] out of the best brought up womanly woman. The only redeeming feature about the whole costume is the little white (? caps, which however vary in size and shape from week to week. Hence no real pride of appearance is possible even in this direction. The criticisms given apply to the female prisoners, as the effect of ugly garments is much more serious with them than with male prisoners, whose khaki coloured garments not very dissimilar from those of the modern Tommy Atkins19 do not constitute so great an eyesore.

But a branch of the prison-system which needs a far more severe criticism is that of the food. One may freely grant at the outset that it would not do to make the prison-fare too palatable, such a [blank space] being a direct encouragement to crime, but the [blank space] to be offered by the intelligent prisoner is that the diet at present is all wrong. Even if the food is not to be

tasty, there is no need for it to be positively nauseous and badly-cooked. Surely we have got beyond the day when a nec. part of the prison punishment was the reduction of the prisoner’s body to the lowest state of efficiency. When the present diet evolved no doubt the idea was that the more Bill Sykes20 was reduced in physique the less harm wd he be able to do when he got out again. But that idea of imprisonment ought surely to have vanished in the day wh. cd. produce such a specimen as Mr. W.C.’s Dartmoor Shepherd [David Evans]! What possible good can be done to humanity by forcing unfortunate men and women to do “hard labour” and sometimes v. hard labour indeed for . . . time at the beginning of their punishment on . . . 6 oz or 8 oz. a loaf of brown bread and skilly21 served out three times a day. The most hungry stomach in time must turn at such food, and the slightly better diet which they get at the next stage is probably given them too late to be of much avail.

Then too the worst feature of the present prison diet is the terrible waste which accompanies. Because of the unpatatatableness of the food, the want of variety and the bad cooking and sometimes the bad materials used in vast quantities of food to be collected from the tins afterwards so as to fill many pails with broken victuals filled me as a prisoner with a feeling of horror. The old proverb “work not, want not” [sic] used to stick in my throat when I saw the great piles of broken bread, vegetables and meat waiting to be taken away to the stoke-hole or dust-hole, and on the other hand remembered the thousands of women and children starving during the dock strike. Then too I thought of the rate payers’ pockets wh. were being cruelly robbed by this wicked waste tho in this case I felt less pity; for I thought that the ratepayers had the matter in their own hands and ought certainly to have the matter carefully investigated. As Suffragettes we had done our best for the public in this matter, with complaining to all the authorities we cd. get at and by showing them the bad potatoes and vegetables and eggs wh. were prob. paid for at top prices. We wondered where the waste food went, whether it were carted away to serve for various purposes or if the Governor or prison authorities wisely kept pigs. We concluded that a fortune cd. be made in the matter in these days of dear bacon.

Then as to the matter of tasks there is room for a vast amount of improvement. Prison labour at present, beneficial as it undoubtedly is, is too greatly restricted and limited. Prisoners are set down to do jobs in the most

20. A vicious, criminal character in Charles Dickens’s novel *Oliver Twist*.
21. Thin soup or gruel.
elementary way at present. The cooking is abominable and antiquated in methods. The laundry work may be sanitary, but it certainly is not admirable. The housemaid work is very roughly and inadequately done. The cutting out of the prison garments is appallingly bad. The carpentry and joinery of the men prisoners merits same desc. Everything in short is done roughly, inefficiently, nothing thoroughly. If while the men and women are forced to do prison-labour their labour could be properly directed and superintended, and if they were taught to do well whatever was allotted to them more wd have been done towards the prevention of crime than years of severe vindictive punishment. As things are at present the waste of power is deplorable! Year by year the ratepayers are paying out vast sums to support a population wh. is manufactured into a criminal class, the power among which class properly directed could do incalculable useful work besides being moulded into future useful citizens. As things are at present the max. of effort is wastefully put forth to obtain a minimum of result. Yet as I said at beg. of this article the system of prison work is the best (blank space) part of the whole system as it stands. It affords occupation to the mind and body of these unfortunates and has its good side too in enabling them to earn remission and a gratuity. The remission is good, but the gratuity is doubtful as it is at present of the nature of sweated labour.

The question of the general morale of the prison system is one that requires earnest revision. The whole trend of this system at present is to encourage and foster vice in the prisoner. Such a statement is strong, but it is deserved. The general atmosphere of prison at present is one of deception and trickery. The prison authorities deceive the prisoner, the prisoners deceive those in authority and play tricks upon one another. There is no honesty in the place. It is such a morally defective atmosphere as this which Suffrage prisoners have found the hardest thing to bear. If a right or a reasonable request is denied them they are not told so right out, but the refusal is put on the back of some authority which cannot be reached. Quibbles and lies abound: Prison officials do not scruple to make specious suggestions of reward upon which they afterwards go back. Such a course is despicable. We know the effect of broken promises upon children: it merely teaches them not to trust those who make the false promises, and, worse, still breeds in them the idea of counter-deception. The prisoner probably fears to report the matter for fear of receiving severe treatment, and also knows in the case of the word of an official against that of a prisoner, which has the better chance. Then again the severity of the enforcement of silence is a direct incitement
to trickery. Prisoners of course take every opportunity to speak, to pass notes and other things to each other and to infringe in any way the many petty enactments made against them. If instead the intercourse at certain times were made a privilege resultant on good conduct, what a different standard might be set up. The whole gist of the matter is this that at present the prison-system is inhuman and demoralizing in its effect upon the character of the prisoner. It is quite certain that those who go out of the walls at present, whatever they may have been before, have had a more or less effective training in the arts of deception. And the more accurately and conscientiously the present system is carried out, the more terrible the effect. The effect is only minimised and annulled where official and warders refuse to be bound by its castiron inhuman rules. Particularly where there is a humane Gov. or Matron is this evident. So too with individual warders or wardresses. Again and again have I observed the attitude of the prisoner towards these. They will consider the severe martinet who fulfils his or her duties to the last jot or tittle of letter as fair game for the most fiendish ingenuity whilst they will scorn to play any subterfuges on the humane official who knows where it is absolutely nec. and prudent to shut his or her eyes. There, too, as I have already said, the evil is not between official and prisoner only. The prisoner who has been bullied for the sake of red tape will not hesitate to spy on and tell tales of a fellow prisoner vindicating the proverb that walls have ears. I have heard of such an one deliberately dirtying a fellow prisoner's [?] to prevent her earning full remission. Another way in which the present system does harm is that very often the official has to do what good he or she can by stealth. Thus a really kind officer will often seek to appear severe and punctilious when his or her superior officer is standing by the prisoner, often understanding and playing up to the benefactor. But such a state of affairs is intolerable for anyone with any sense of responsibility. As things are at present the prison officials are not to blame. They are in the grip of a vicious system, and very often do the best they can to make amends for it. It is the system which must be changed.

The aim of the future prison system must be educative and reformative rather than to be deterrent. Because the latter has been the main motive in the past, it will probably be a work of time and difficulty in the future. Some idea of this necessity seems to have been working in (blank space) minds of the late Home Sec.\textsuperscript{22} who undoubtedly tried to make a move in a new direc-

\textsuperscript{22} A reference to Winston Churchill (?), who served as Home Secretary from 1910 to October 1911, or to Herbert Gladstone, who served 1905–1910.
tion. But mere tinkering will not do. A tremendous change must take place. Recent writers on the subject of prison-reform recognize that our prisons are mainly filled with unfortunates who have never had a fair chance whether mentally, morally or physically, of taking a decent or possible place in this age's economy. Any who either as prisoner or privileged observer goes into our prisons and sees day after day the phenomena there displayed, will know that those are mainly the derelicts, the jetsam and flotsam of the tide of humanity who have been hurled about helpless, because of the hopeless conditions under which they have been borne and bred. They will realise that it is more than prison-reform which is required it is a revising of the present structure of society, it means a (blank space) of the housing question, the question of the mental and moral defectives, the question of morality, of the (blank space) of the White Slave Traffic, the abolition of sweating, the consideration of (blank space) temperance. At the root of this prison-canker lies the real social problem which must be faced by the country to-day in the solving of which the people of England be wise to remember the old adage that "two heads are wiser than one."


This topical essay deals with a contemporary figure, John Syme, who in 1909 was reprimanded for his actions in regard to an arrest in August of that year in which two men were charged with causing a disturbance in Warwick Street, and brought before him at the Gerald Road Police Station in the Pimlico Division. Syme released the two suspects on the ground the charge was unjustified. The two arresting constables were reprimanded, but Syme objected to this discipline as unfair and was transferred to North Fulham because he was "obviously too familiar with the constables." This incident began a decade of contention between Syme and the Metropolitan Police, whose force he tried to unionize during the years 1913–1917. Douglas Browne writes that Syme became, "something of a public figure, he showed himself to possess all the arts of the born agitator, and with the example of the Suffragettes before him adopted some of their methods. During the rest of 1910 (and, as will be seen, for long after) his activities, and still more those of his less scrupulous supporters, were a constant cause of annoyance to the Commissioner's office, which

found a routine disciplinary measure noisily exploited as an instance of gross injustice" (Browne, 276). Browne writes as the author of a history of Scotland Yard, and Davison as one who was subjected to the ministrations of the London Police, and so their opinions might be expected to differ.

Davison seems to find it easy to believe in the idea of a corrupt police force and to subscribe to Syme's perspective, perhaps because of how the police treated suffragettes. Mary Thompson tells a story of having been falsely accused of causing a disturbance of the peace while actually the victim of "hoolligons" who attempted to steal a barrel organ she was playing to raise funds for the WSPU on a Saturday in February 1908. When she and a friend sought help from a constable he took them to Marlborough Street Police Station where they would be "safe." To their astonishment, they were taken before the Magistrate at 3 p.m. and accused of "obstructing the police in the discharge of their duty," and a policeman they had never seen, as well as the policeman whose help they had initially sought, both lied in the witness box (They Couldn't Stop Us!, 30–31). In addition to being a victim of perjured testimony Mary Thompson was subjected to a lecture from the magistrate to the effect that it was her own fault for going to Oxford Street with a barrel organ in the first place; she should have expected to cause trouble. As she left the police station that afternoon, the policeman, whose help she and her friend had originally sought, approached her and this exchange took place. He said, "I hope you do not think any the worse of me," I said, "Well, I should think better of you if you had not told lies" . . . He said, 'You don't know how difficult it is.' I said, 'Do you mean that those in authority over you want you to tell lies?' He again murmured an assent." (They Couldn't Stop Us!, 32).

A charge of corruption and of collusion between press and government in hiding such instances appears in an April 1911 letter of Dr. Mansell Moullin, vice president of the College of Surgeons, who wrote to the Times of London protesting the treatment of suffragette deputations to Parliament on "Black Friday," November 18, 1910, contradicting the official assertion (presumably in the government report released March 30, 1911) that "the Metropolitan Police behaved with the forbearance and humanity for which they have always been distinguished." Rather, he says, that "the whole disorder was caused by plain clothes men violently assaulting a deputation . . . of twelve ladies—several of them over seventy years of age—who were doing what they had a perfect legal right to do." Mansell Moullin writes that he was one of those who "saw the brutal way in which the police behaved, saw the way in which they treated the women, and afterwards saw some of the bruises and other marks of injuries
which had been inflicted by the police. In a conspiracy of silence, the Times refused to publish the letter. Evidence of police threats against law-abiding women recur in the pages of suffrage journals. The January 20, 1910, issue of Common Cause reports threats of arrest on a charge of "molesting" against women who ask for signatures on petitions outside of polling places. 

On Sunday afternoon one of the most interesting meetings in the cause of Progress was held in Trafalgar Square, when a brave man, ex-Inspector Syme, exposed to the British Public the terrible system of corrupt Officialdom which exists in the Metropolitan Police force to-day. To an audience mainly composed of the thoughtful citizen which forms the backbone of the country he unfolded a ghastly tale of Bumbledom which is sucking the very life-blood out of our police-force, and that very important branch of the public service namely the police and law courts, which is fed by the police force. The listeners were visibly impressed by the plain and unhesitating tale told by this champion of their rights who had risked and was risking his all in the cause of justice and righteousness in public life and who urged upon them the fact that so long as they allowed dust to be thrown in their eyes by those in power as to these iniquities, so long should they themselves suffer and suffer deservedly from the results of corruption and wrong doing. He unfolded the terrible consequences that result from the official demand for cases leading to the manufacture of such cases. 

He put before the audience how the rank and file of the force themselves dare not protest against this Juggernaut which makes innocent victims, for if they dare to lift their voices in protest (as to their honour some have done), they were victimized, degraded and assaulted by 'superior' officers, until in some cases young police-men had been driven to committing suicide. He showed how some of these 'superior' officers have dealings with bookmakers which disgust and degrade the people of the turf themselves, whom they blackmail at every turn. He exposed the system of tip-taking or rather blackmailing, practiced in the East End and other parts on unfortunate coster mongers. He showed how even the most important cases, such as that of the unfortunate Stinie Morrison, were 'warped and doctored' by the false evidence of certain parts of the force to hide their own

24. For this and for an extended analysis of the Black Friday protest, see Caroline Morrell, "Black Friday"and Violence Against Women in the Suffrage Movement (London: Women's Research and Resources Centre Publications, 1981), 65.

25. On this, see p. 148, the young woman accused of soliciting in the Black Maria.
One case that he particularly vindicated was that of the young constable Greaves, who played a prominent part at the trial. He also laid before his audience in an unflinching spirit of daring the way the brightest police officials and the very Home Office itself played with [?into?] the hands of their subordinates by backing up their dishonesty. It is quite certain that the majority of that audience went home to think furiously, and will want to hear more [of] the revelations, which this progressive reformer is hoping to make at his fortnightly meetings in Trafalgar Square. But what about the 'Fat [?] men' of Bumbledom [?] How will they regard the exposure of the precious truth?

26. This notorious case of the murder of a “French Jew named Leon Beron” occasioned a 70,000-signature petition to the Home Secretary for a reprieve of Morrison, who was convicted in part because of false evidence given by Constable Greaves; and by procedural irregularities in his arrest and charging (“Clapham Common Murder,” Evening Post [New Zealand], April 15, 1911).