

IMPRISONMENT OF THE ENGLISH WOMAN SUFFRAGISTS.*

Letter of Mr. Cobden-Sanderson to the London Chronicle.

On entering the prison my wife was stripped of all her things save her wedding ring, and redressed in the clothing of the prison; and, in place of her name, was numbered with a number which is now her name, deprived of all associations save those of the prison which is now her new and silent world. Her food—she is a vegetarian—consists of dry bread, tea or cocoa and potatoes. She is in solitary confinement for twenty-three hours out of the twenty-four. For one hour, in silence, she is—with other prisoners, six feet apart—walked backwards and forwards in a yard in the prison enclosure. In her cell she has for occupation the making of postmen's bags. For reading, the Bible—that book of Revolutions! What a mockery!—and a book called "A Healthy Home," which, she says with a smile, is of no use to her there. She asked for a Shakespeare; there was but one volume in the prison and that was engaged. She asked for pen and paper that she might right down her meditations. That was refused; it was against the prison regulations.

She asked me—it was her only request—to apply to the Home Secretary on her behalf, and on behalf of all "prisoners and captives," to be allowed the use of pen and paper and ink, wherewith to deliver themselves of their thoughts, burning within them all day and all night, and unutterable. She makes no complaint for herself, but in isolation prays for the cause of women. Will that prayer be answered? Is there, then, no soul of woman really, no anything in the world? A world of shadows only? No man of heart, of genius, to bid all legislation stop, and the world's vain turmoil cease, till woman shall have stepped with the help of man to where man stands, that, hand in hand, and heart in heart, they may together climb the steep path of life?

Such, O foolish world and vain! such, if you will hear it, is the appeal, voiceless now, of the daughter of him who gave you bread.

T. COBDEN-SANDERSON.

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Letter of Mr. Bernard Shaw to the London Times.

This is a terrible moment in our national life. We are not often thoroughly frightened. When England trembles the world knows that a great peril overshadows our island.

It is not the first time that we have faced dangers that have made even our gayest and bravest clench their teeth and hold their breath. We watched the Armada creeping slowly up the Channel. We wiped our brow when chance revealed the treason of Guy Fawkes. We are listening even now for the bugle of the German invader, and scanning the waves we rule for the periscope of the French sub-marine.

But until now we have faced our fate like men, with our Parliament unshaken in our midst, grandly calm as the Roman Senators who sat like statues when Brennus and his barbarians charged blood-stained into their hall. When Charles Bradlaugh,

the most muscular man in England, dashed into the House of Commons to claim a seat in that august assembly, the police carried him, titanically struggling, down the stairs, deposited him in the yard with a shattered fountain pen and disdainfully set him free to do his worst.

It was but the other day that a desperado arose in the Strangers' Gallery of the House of Commons and burst into disorderly eloquence. Without a moment's hesitation the dauntless attendants hurled themselves upon him and extruded him from our Legislature. He was not haled before the magistrate; he was not imprisoned; no man deigned to ask securities for his good behavior; the British lion scorned protection against so puny an antagonist.

But the strongest nerves give way at last. The warriors of Phillip were, when all is said, only men. German soldiers, French bluejackets, Guy Fawkes, Bradlaugh, and the stranger in the gallery, bold and dangerous as they were, were no females. The peril to-day wears a darker, deadlier aspect.

Ten women—ten petticoated, long-stockinged, corseted females—have hurled themselves on the British Houses of Parliament. Desperate measures are necessary. I have a right to speak in this matter, because it was in my play, "Man and Superman," that my sex were first warned of woman's terrible strength and man's miserable weakness.

It is a striking confirmation of the correctness of my views that the measures which have always been deemed sufficient to protect the House of Commons against men are not to be trusted against women. Take, for example, the daughters of Richard Cobden, long known to everybody worth knowing in London as among the most charming and interesting women of our day. One of them—one only, and she the slightest and rosiest of the family—did what the herculean Charles Bradlaugh did.

To the immortal glory of our metropolitan police, they did not blench. They carried the lady out, even as they carried Bradlaugh. But they did not dare to leave her at large as they left him. They held on to her like grim death until they had her safe under bolt and bar, until they had stripped her to see that she had no weapons concealed, until a temperate diet of bread and cocoa should have abated her perilous forces. She—and the rest of the terrible ten.

For the moment we have time to breathe. But has the Government considered the fact that, owing to the imperfections of our law, these ladies will be at large again before many weeks are passed? I ask, in the name of the public, whether proper precautions have been taken. It is not enough for Mr. Herbert Gladstone, Mr. Haldane, Mr. Asquith and Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman to sit there pale and determined, with drawn lips and folded arms, helplessly awaiting a renewal of the assault—an assault the consequences of which no man can foresee.

It is their duty without a moment's delay to quadruple the police staff inside the Houses of Parliament. Westminster and Vauxhall Bridges should be strongly held by the Guards. If necessary, special constables should be enrolled. I am no coward, but I do not want to see a repetition of the folly that found us unprepared in 1899.

I submit, however, that if these precautions are

*See "The Woman Suffrage Agitation in England," page 801 of The Public of Nov. 24.