

And so the sisters and their joyous troupe, the piper children and the maiden spirits of the trees, danced on together, with the little story lovers standing by.

As I watched them, it seemed to me that this festival, wrought with love and joy, could tell us of more than the old fairy story of the pricked finger and the long sleep ended by a kiss, more than the vanquishing of the winter by the spring and the fleeting of the darkness from the day.

As they danced on, it seemed to me that we were allwhelmed by a flood of love and joy and radiance, and that cleansed of pain and sin, and throwing off social wrongs and false standards of life, we might begin to be brothers and sisters from that hour.

So life appeared to me, till the cold hard world outside dimmed the brightness and warmth glowing in my heart, and seemed to bolster up anew the barriers I had thought so easy to surmount. Just a year afterwards I learnt that the little Sleeping Beauty had died of a lingering illness, which began shortly after the Festival – the one great joyous event of her short life. For months before she died, she had been unable to go out into the fresh air, for the tenement in which her family lived was up so many flights of steps, and she so weak.

4. Prisoners

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Beginning with the written words of a prisoner, this chapter opens with another stark change in tone. Titled 'Prisoners', it addresses a subject that became of considerable interest and importance to many militant suffragettes as their own experiences of imprisonment confronted them, first-hand and often for the first time, with the plight of incarcerated women. Speaking to other prisoners, suffragettes discovered women who had been convicted by all-male juries and sentenced by a male judge for crimes, such as infanticide, that were frequently resorted to by women who suffered desperate poverty, rape and sexual exploitation. Meanwhile, the men responsible for the exploitation of and violence against these women frequently went unsanctioned. The treatment of women in prison reinforced the view that they were morally at fault and individually responsible for the circumstances in which they found themselves. The experience of prison furnished militant suffrage campaigners with further arguments for women's suffrage: firstly, that enfranchised women would reform legislation that discriminated against women and would instead punish sexual abuse, and secondly, that women would instigate prison reform. After her own imprisonment, Sylvia became profoundly committed to this approach. She used her experiences to advocate for prison reform, publishing an article with her own illustrations in the *Pall Mall Magazine* in which she compared Holloway with a prison in Milan that she had visited after her release whilst on a recuperative holiday with Emmeline Pethick Lawrence. The Penal Reform League (which later merged with the Howard Association to form the Howard League for Penal Reform) was formed at the celebratory breakfast to welcome Sylvia and fellow suffragette Charlotte Despard on their release from prison.¹

Choosing 'Life in a London prison' as one of the three titles for her North American lectures enabled Sylvia to contextualise militancy by exposing the Liberal government's repressive nature and make the case for women's citizenship based on the efforts of militant suffragettes; in her first speech at the Carnegie Lyceum she 'told of the prison reform they