

Vigil

A Journal of Mountjoy

November 1922

By Dorothy Macardle

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Wed 22nd Nov

Never was a heretic more completely captured in the atmosphere of an alien world than I am here.

I am sure that nothing that can happen will ever make me a member of the Roman Catholic Church. There is a quaint childlikeness in it, a fantastical exactitude about the unimaginable other world which would always shut

the like of me outside. Yet, I am sure that of all religions in the world, it provides most openings and avenues into spiritual life, most magic for the creation of unseen powers. Mrs Humphry's is the Mother Catholic here. Three times daily, she shepherds us all to prayer, and we kneel on the bare stairway looking up at the little altar they have made with sweet with sweet pious ingenuity, where a candle lights up a gilded picture of our Lady of perpetual succour, and murmur the rosary in Irish for Miss MacSwiney's sake. This is another thing which seems strange to me, that instead of framing in the imagination and in

p.4 Prayers & Wonders Wed 22nd Nov
careful words the one grace and blessing we all desire they say always these same traditional words. I cannot pray so. Indeed I can scarcely ever pray at all, but sometimes I can image the opening of the gate, image her release and recovery with an intensity that may perhaps be helping a little to bring these to pass, and I can call on invisible, beneficent powers, but without knowing, ever, whether they hear or heed. I think this praying of mine worthless, but I am quite sure that there are some of these religious, pure hearted women whose prayers have power. For their intentions, we are all praying now in order as Miss MacSwiney asked for them; first that her sister may be let in, second that Erskine Childers may be saved from execution and third for her release. I prayed so strongly, at my first vigil for the first; trying to thrust my will on the prison governor, and

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appealing to the invisible powers, that I felt sure almost, that they would bring her in. But when I prayed for Erskine Childers; it became clear to me that prayer must be always only for the highest spiritual thing and that this is the meaning of that perplexing, 'thy will be done', which used to seem to me to annul our prayer. I knew that I must pray for the purification of Ireland and for his life only if the sacrifice of it was not necessary to that end. It seemed to me that he might very probably be spared. But when I prayed for Miss MacSwiney; I felt desolate, because it seemed that the people of Ireland could not be purified again and quickened without her death. When I questioned Lili; I found her thoughts had gone just the other way, and I think she is more likely to have caught the truth.

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Lili's Miracle

I think Lili has a rare spiritual power. Her faith in her religion, in her friends and heroes and in the Republic is un-flickering, imaginative and joyous. No small thing I think can darken her mind. And even the death of our noblest I believe would seem bearable to her – death for this faith. She understands the spiritual bearings of things. Tonight, when I came on Vigil after her, there was a sense that surprised and subdued me of the benign presences. It was as if it was leaning over us, waiting for our prayers.

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Lili came down from her vigil quiet and glowing, her little white face like a child saint's. She sat in a corner

telling the strangest, fantastic things about her vigil, with such sweet wonder that it is certain she believed it in the depths of her heart. She told us the candle was guttering out and that the melting wax, as it fell formed itself from one figure after another of the Madonna and the Saints. St. Patrick was there and the holy Mother and Child. Quite evidently this little mystery had filled her with happiness and hope.

p.8 The Blessed Spirit Wed 22nd Nov

{p.7 Tessie and I kept Vigil together} last night - the two earliest hours. Miss MacSwiney was very peaceful, although wide awake. There is no doubt that receiving the sacrament has given her fresh strength. It was when Tessie and I were both kneeling that the strange little mystery happened. The place was very quiet, no one moving at all, and I wondered when I heard light swift footsteps coming down as if from her room and felt someone pass behind me and pause at the top of the stairs - so surprised that I turned to look - there was no one there. For a moment my heart failed me. I wondered if she had died and her spirit had gone past us into the night, but the thought seemed extravagant. Without looking at Tessie, I went on praying just as I had been. But in a moment, she looked round with

p.9 Thurs 23rd Nov
a perplexed countenance at me, asking who had passed. She had heard a foot fall behind us and heard it pause on the stairs. Startled, I went quickly into Miss MacSwiney's room and was relieved to find her there, still wide awake. Tessie and I were pleased by this

mysterious visit and because it seemed a brotherly presence – Terence MacSwiney perhaps. But those who came to relieve us, when we told them, grew terrified of our "ghost".

Thurs 23rd Nov

This has been a peaceful, even happy day. Our patient has so much more strength, and the fret and trouble seem almost gone. She wrote a splendid answer to a very stupid statement which was in the papers of Bishop Cohalan. It is good to hear of the deputation to Cosgrove, Louise Gavan Duffy and Mrs. Mulcahy, and even Mrs. Wyse Power!

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We suspected that the medical report book was being written up by nurses who knew nothing of how Miss MacSwiney was. Brigid looked about and found a quite false report that last night Miss MacSwiney has slept for, I think Seven hours. We protested and began to keep a report book of our own. I wrote a report of "Miss MacSwiney's Condition" to the D.P.ⁱ

p.13 Erskine Childers

Thurs 23rd Nov

And there is a rumor that the authorities of this prison went to Portobello to beg for her release. If only God or Ireland would inspire them to insist, to threaten, to resign! But there is little hope of this. Erskine Childers application for Habeas Corpus still goes on for himself and 8 unnamed prisoners. It is distressing to hear his Counsel's argument, all based on the [derivation] of authority for the King. I can't help wondering if it could

not have been more frankly and less objectively done. Could not Counsel have asserted, while maintaining that the King's authority in Ireland was nothing, that the accusers had no logical or consistent case even on their own assumption. "Men are terrible muddlers", as Miss MacSwiney says. In the evening news came; first heart sinking that the application for writs of Habeus Corpus had been refused. But an hour later Lili came in, her little white face aglow. The case

p.14 Parcels Thurs 23rd Nov
is deferred until Monday to the count of appeal."Oh", she sighed joyfully, "I'll play a game of Bridge!". She and Davy, Noreen and Lucie are playing quietly now under the light.

At last, this afternoon my pens and paper came! A note from poor Iseult this morning. She has been ill and is miserable about the world, promising to send my things; then a wooden box from Leverett and Frye. I met our "local" staggering under it and groaning, "Christmas is coming". There are pressed meats of all kinds, jam and biscuits and lemon curd, innumerable delicious things. All that will last. I am burying against the day when we shall forfeit parcels for some enterprise.
but we had an exciting tea. And there were pens and papers and I have begun at last to write this journal.
God Speed the Work!

p.15 Effects of Ham Thurs 23rd Nov

Good resolutions! But at the end of their game such groans of hunger and pathetic picturing's of food they hoped ~~not~~ for came forth from the players that I could not forbear to say casually, In a minute I'll give you some bread and ham. At first there was a gasp, then an ecstatic silence, then like a bacchanalian rout they were upon me while I cut bread and spread it with butter and dispensed ham sandwiches. A choral hymn of rapture followed the first taste of it, then a munching quiet and after the second sandwich all round, such intoxicated hilarity that the girls on vigil had to come and implore us to make less noise. My vigil was from eleven to one. Miss MacSwiney lay so still, breathing so faintly, it was hard to know whether she was living or dying. There were moments of suspense, but all was well.

p.16 The Sacrifice Thurs 23rd Nov

It is the twenty-first day now. After this, Nurse Dunne says, even if a hunger-striker is released it is either death or health broken forever. And now, Miss MacSwiney has said to Noreen; the shrinking of the flesh will begin and the neuralgic pain. Standing over her in that dark room while she lay still, unconscious of anything but utter weariness and the necessity to endure on and on, her eyes closed, her sweet face hollow and thin, an odium of it all rushed on me. The minutes pass over her so slowly, so monotonously here, each one of them deepening her suffering, bearing her nearer to an anguish one dare scarcely imagine. And outside throughout Ireland, what work

are those dreadful moments achieving? And for whom? Are the people she is torturing herself

p.17 Dream of Parole Fri 24th Nov

for worth it all? Ireland is worth it. I know she is right prophetically, heroically right. But how are we ever to forgive our own generation if they leave her here to die?

Fri 24th Nov

I have been trying to write a poem but the thing I want to say is too hard for me, and I can't catch my own thoughts in the air in this chatter-full room. So instead, I sat up in bed and in view of the weekly invitation to confession, wrote out some "posers for priests"! I am tempted to go into the confessional for the fun of posing them, but I suppose it would be sacrilegious to use the confessional so.

An interesting dream I had last night. I was out for one day on parole and had gone into college. The attitudes of all the different people were as unexpected as you would expect them to be. Miss [Joyce] intensely

p.18 Letters Fri 24th Nov

though shyly, sorry. The girls almost tragic, lovingly kind. Miss White, when I said goodbye gave me a firm handclasp at arm's length - the dream was not fair to her. Miss Webb clung to me and kissed me with an affection that remembered everything.

My only letter was from Sir Robert Woods as skilled and formal as though we had never been friends, saying the swelling above the old scar need not worry

me at all. He disapproves of me, I suppose. I hope they won't scold Patricia for writing to me. I enjoy her letters: funny, restrained little notes, generally with a child-like, affectionate outburst at the end. And she sent me a pack of cards, which was a thoughtful gift. Chrysanthemums came yesterday from Maud Cherry, and she was one of the first to write

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but an odd, embarrassed letter. She is an ingrained conservative, I think, whose knowledge of history of the world makes her feel that she would like to be a revolutionary - but she never will. The quaintest letter of all was from that good, Christian protestant [Frideswide], a little account, like a schoolgirls essay, of the expedition to places of interest in Dublin, which she took my Division iv, and not one syllable or hint about my arrest. The fulfillment of what she felt to be a Christian duty, I suspect. Dads' letters, full of his faith in the Free State, hoping that Miss MacSwiney will take food or be granted "a fool's pardon", full too of concern for me; are another demonstration of the oddity of the [mistake] out of which God made man. Mothers' letters, which are sympathetic; and Donald's, which are vividly narrative; and Helga's and Lilian's

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are the best. Mona's are as always pathetically constrained. Yet I know she would do everything there is to be done for me, if she were here. As it is, there is no one idle enough or quite concerned enough to imagine my necessities and send me the things I want.

lseult is very good, but I know more would be done if I had anyone of my own. I wrote to Lilian yesterday and I asked that my girls – only my best friends- would send me writing things. If they are at all what I remember myself at their age in friendship to have been, they will be happy doing this. Girls give friendship of a loyal and lovely kind. Life without my students will be emptied of a most precious thing. I am quite sure to lose my college post.

p.21 Erskine Childers Execution Fri 24th Nov

Lili was happier and more hopeful about Erskine Childers today, but Miss MacSwiney told her the appeal for Monday had been refused. About dinner time we could hear a 'Stop-Press' being cried in the streets. Lili said it must be an order for Miss MacSwiney's release. I stayed in, copying letters, while she and the others went out to exercise and Mrs. Humphries told me Erskine Childers had been killed. We know, this evening, that it is true. They have killed him, put him out of Ireland, out of life. That dear, loving, grateful, brilliant heroic man. They have done a hideous, unutterable, never-to-be forgiven thing. Erskine Childers was good; good and clear and splendid to the heights and depths of his spirit. He

p. 22 Execution Fri 24th Nov

gave and won the love that belongs only to heroes and saints. Every moment of my memory of him is splendid with the worth of his work, and his fearlessness, happy with his quick, impetuous praise. He was selfless in his devotion to Ireland as a woman might be in love. He

had the wisdom and penetration of the astutest politician and yet he founded every thought and act of his on pure principles and truth. His life and all that belonged to it was right and happy in spite of dangers and losses beyond number, and gentle always in spite of the poisonous hostilities of the vilest foes. ~~His wife, his boys, his home and few possessions were all~~ His wife is wonderful and their love fabulous and there are no sons of Ireland finer than his two boys.

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To have put all that happiness, all that sweetness, all that glorious service out of the world. What has come to the men he laboured for that they could do this thing?

Despair of Ireland, hate of our race, recollections of dangers and labours suffered for these traitors. Praise of the men these traitors have killed, is all [...] theme of the prison talk tonight. It is like the execution of Casement, they say. Lili is reconciled, kind and brave. Davy is perhaps the most desperate. I am selfish. I cannot help it; miserable for my own loss. I thought his friendship was one of the golden things to come. I thought I could be working under him. We have not told Miss MacSwiney. She is so very weak. It is said now, Nurse Dunne tells us, that it is their intention to let her die and to kill [E...] O' Maille and the seven other men, and to

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take some revenge against Mrs. Humphries. I think it is likely to be true. The new reign of terror has begun - God help de Valera!

God [strengthen] help us to save Ireland from these corrupt and evil men!

When I was working with Erskine Childers those days of the fighting in Dublin, I kept a rough record, and I wrote the story of our journey to Waterford in a green manuscript book. I wish I could know whether the raiders have burnt these and two other little notes I had from him.

The jealousy and meanness that are in our people are so pitiful that it was perhaps the only way his honor could be saved - this death for the Republic. His best friends are saying it is for the best. Frank Gallagher told Cecilia in

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a letter that he had promised it would be his lifework, if Childers died, to tell the story of his splendid life. I am thankful he is living to do this. I know he will do it well. He was a man whose praise one longs for. He praised me and made me write for the Republic and all this time while he was fighting, I have done my best. I would have loved to know that he was pleased. These are contemptible, selfish, thoughts.

Gods pity and the love and pity of Ireland on Bobby, Mrs. Childers and Erskine Óg!

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Mulcahy

It is Mulcahy, we understand, who is responsible for refusing the release. Some paper has published the

statement that he is little Moira MacSwiney's Godfather and that once he was ill with pneumonia in Miss MacSwiney's house and she nursed him back to health and saved his valuable life.

She is angry that this has been made public. She hates to remember that he is Moira's godfather – "Someday, I will get hold of that church register and scratch it out!", she said vehemently. "Do", I answered, with my heart shrinking at that "someday".

But how to account for this most strange being? Is he, as a pupil of mine suggested once, like Shakespeare's Richard ii; a contemplative, a poet, forced into action by mischance?

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Or, as I suggested then, Macbeth; a man full of imagination and natural goodness taking one evil step and then forced for his own protection to go the devil's way, "Things bad begun make strong themselves by ill". It cannot be explained in either of these ways; "a fanatic", "an ascetic" Miss MacSwiney says, "He thinks he should crush his own feelings in everything". Here I am sure is insight and the truth. It is a most dangerous, unconquerable type; upheld in cruelty by all the selfless enthusiasm of a martyr, incorruptible focus his ruthless course, unconquerable by fear. St. Kevin, who strangled the young girl who served and loved him, must have been such a man. What a figure of

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tragedy! What drama would not Shakespeare have created around such a man. I suppose there is no

greater danger to human character than this pride we sometimes take in crushing our human, natural clemencies. War enforces this and all warriors must learn to do it. Where it ceases to be good and becomes hideously evil is hard surely to discern. It is specially a danger of this hateful war.

p.30 Civilization

Sat 25th Nov

A rumor and a promise have been throbbing in the air for a week. This morning it was fulfilled. Davy came back from the bathroom with the news that the hot water was hot. Owing to congestion in our landing, I went upstairs. Mrs. Humphry's had made her bath as clean as any bath ever seen. I lay in deep, hot water and washed with flower-scented frothy soap and was at peace with the world. Afterwards, I climbed up on the bath and found a place where the tainted glass of the window was scratched clear, and I saw the water of the canal, and the streets all jolly in the cold sunlight, and a woman going out in a fur coat, and the white smoke of a train.

And surely, surely it seemed, that to be anywhere in the free air of the world, whether poor or alone or hungry or defeated or derelict, is all a human being need desire. These are prison moods, I suppose, as foolishly

p.31 Prison Moods - Bad News

Sat 25th Nov

as all the moods which would make us fly to troubles that we know not of than hear those ills we have. They would come more poignantly and oftener. I am sure, if the one absorbing anxiety were past.

When I went into Miss MacSwiney again, she had been told, I could see, about Erskine Childers' death. She was lying deep in her pillows, un-responding, suffering. I leant over her and kissed her. "I can't forgive them", she whispered, "can't forgive them for killing Erskine Childers". I talked just a little, praising him, but nothing could distract her from the worst misery of it, "I feel ashamed...ashamed". Still, to this great heart the Irish people are one and the faithful are ashamed with the iniquity of the traitors. I lost that sense of fellowship long ago, perhaps because

p. 33 The Open-Air Sat 25th Nov

I never knew any of these renegade men. She had tears in her eyes. It is the only time I have seen her cry. It has been a cold, pale day, lit by a wintry sun. When I went out over our little compound even was glamorous with a faint gold. In the colorless sky over the dull solid turrets of the prison, floated a streak of fragile clouds, every tint in them of silver and gold and bronze. My mind is full of Robert Louis Stevenson today. I wish he had been in prison and written of it.

*To make this earth our hermitage,
A cheerful and a changeful page,
God's ~~strange~~ bright and intricate device
Of days and seasons doth suffice
How many days and seasons, I wonder will*

p.35 Sat 25th Nov

be lost out of our lives and we looking always at the sky only and dusty grass plots and stone walls. It is a queer robbery that we can be robbed of the berries in

the hedges and the frozen pools.

And yet, I will tell the truth. It is not God's hills and rivers that I am longing for at all. It is [of the London underground Stevenson's verses make me think!] I want cities and theatres and travel and the talk of far-off friends, foreign cities, and the Liffey under the city lights and Donald ~~and to be talking of faery plays or life in the Republic of Ireland, at peace and full~~ and to be trying over the music for a faery play...

p.36 The Bible – Jehovah Sat 25th Nov

At night, during my vigils I have been reading that grand, shameless, pagan book; the Old Testament - the book of Kings. A rich and gorgeous world it is this of King David and Solomon and Saul. David is as loveable as Lancelot, I think and a stronger more original personality, more outright and daring in his sin. From his adorable boyhood to his royal old age, he has the same vital, originating mind and unhesitant will. His impetuous human affections, tenacious, magnanimous and child hearted as Lancelot [found them]; the free passionate imagination breaking out in the lyric outcry over Jonathan and Absalom. The immense Kingliness of the Man, the manliness of the boy and of the King - make up one of the most vivid personalities recorded or imagined I have ever known.

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But what a God it this Jehovah! Jealous, petty, self-glorious, tyrannical, mean, an absolute enslaver of the soul of man, by lavish favoritism and terrorism unsurpassable by any fiend.

Is the God of Israel, God the Father? The father of Christ? Not Oramah? He did not condemn it and it is stronger in us than Christianity today. To suffer blows and humiliation patiently is good, Christ teaches, it is base and lavish, answers the blood of man, in which the violent

p.32 Sat 25th Nov

Ms. MacSwiney read in this morning's paperⁱⁱ that her sister left the gates last night, without breaking her fast, and returned this morning. She is distressed and puzzled about this. The paper contained part of her letter to Bishop Cohalan.

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No Change

Sun 26th Nov

When the others went to mass at 9 o C, I went up to take care of Miss MacSwiney. The report of the last watchers was 'very restless and moaning'. I dreaded finding her in pain, but when I went in, she looked up at me smiling and talked to, but her voice was very faint. "No Change" is the report, as always in the morning papers. This is desperate, most mean and dangerous part of the campaign. Lily proposed interviewing Dr. O' Connor and we waylaid him with four of five cuttings giving the same farcical account of her. His defense was that these were not based on medical reports and what the papers said was no concern of his. We challenged his professional honour and told him that it would certainly appear to be collusion between him and the Government in a campaign against her life. He consented at last to try to stop these reports.

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Slavery

Sun 26th Nov

Even at this crisis, this man whose sympathies are fair enough could not be persuaded to break through the routine of his work, risk his post, speak one unexpected word. Indeed, it is not yet untrue to say [of that us] that we are a nation of slaves. This moral enslavement is a thing so massive so oppressive and at the same time so imperceptible to the senses that the Irish people has crawled under it for generations and never known themselves to be less than men. To conceal our true desires, to hide our flag, be secretive about our faith, to refrain from the enterprises we would gladly undertake, to hold back from supporting

our more fearless friends from championing a losing campaign. To defer to people and opinions that we despise, to live the tools of systems which we abhor, to act speak and even think an intricate and endless lie - this slavery is Ireland's Slavery; the very basic foundation of the "Irish Free State". From this the Republic of Ireland shall be free.

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Sun 26th Nov

Sunday night was very unhappy. Miss MacSwiney was wretchedly weak and looked up with such suffering eyes that I could hardly keep serene enough to lay with her. Then I found Bridie expounding a question of conduct to her and insisting on her arbitrating. Eithne Coyle and Norah O' Shea had been brought in. They had not been given leave to have their cells unlocked at night. Ought they to refuse to go into them at 9 o' clock. It was evidently a hard and very distressing problem to Miss MacSwiney and she bore it with a seriousness and an effort to concentrate that was very painful to see. Bridie insisted on her deciding. Miss MacSwiney could not help realizing that a fight would probably mean for her the loss of us as we should be locked in our cells. To me

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that thought was unbearable and to fight for this seemed unreasonable, needlessly aggressive, even a little like taking an unfair advantage of the concession- "It is a concession, not a right", Miss MacSwiney said, and then sinking wearily into her pillows very gently très [...fully], "I am afraid I'll have to ask you to let

someone else decide...I am too much concerned".

Really indignant, I said surely the newcomers had consciences and could decide for themselves and went with Bridie out of the room. Then followed fierce little meetings at the stairhead, in passages, and in our ward - extreme wrath against what seemed the arrogance of Bridie, determination to put an end to this unstable position. The little contention ended with an interview with Cosgrave when he readily agreed at the request of Bridie and Lily to extend the concession to the other two.

p.45 The Split Sun 26th Nov

It came to a head with this little crisis – the curious latent conflict which is in the Republic - the difference that is between the political party and the army - between De Valera and Rory, and here between the Militarist Cuman na mBan element and "Suffolk Street". We think them vastly pugilistic, too ready to be aggressive on a weak case. They think us "willing slaves". We think the military organisation should serve - they think it should command.

There are two acutely apposite points of view as to what should be our attitude here. We would fight but only for our rights within the prison - they would find pretext for fighting all the time. We want to study, write and debate and dislike incessant distraction. Distraction to them the breath of life. They opposed the subject to a Prisoners' Council tonight. We have decided that we must insist on forming one. Lily is on the warpath and on fire.

p.46 A Night of Fear Sun 26th Nov

After all this when I went into her, I found Miss MacSwiney exhausted and suffering more than I have seen her ever before. Her hands were clutching and twisting from the maddening tingle and irritation of the nerves of her arms.

I asked if her head ached. She said no, but [there was] she had a bothered feeling in it. She would have nobody blamed, "they were quite right", she would not have me distressed. She let me massage the poor, thin wrists with eau-de-cologne, and settle her pillows, and praised my strong hands and pretended to be restful then. I think she was a little easier, but she did not fall asleep. It all began to seem utterly impossible; as if it must be a nightmare and not true, that this awful thing had to go on. We had been told so definitely by everyone that they mean to let her die; the savagery of those [executions/recanting] opened so

p.47 This Sacrifice Sun 26th Nov

familiar and horrible a policy. The press was so false and powerful an enemy - Ireland so enslaved and dead-hearted and corrupt. All hope of her release was gone from me.

The longing images that used to come of happy days when we would be talking together, maybe at seventy-three, remembering all this had to be thrust away. I foresaw days and nights of more and more awful agony, as me watching, helpless to relieve it. I foresaw the day she would lie there dead, but it brought a kind of numb madness to think of that. Such horror and such agonising beauty is in all this. Each moment of

this long torture she is inflicting on herself. She is crucifying herself, hourly, daily for the people of Ireland. And not for

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Sun 26th Nov

any swift, bright, tangible salvation her agony and death can give them, but for the little hope of bringing a little courage back to their fainting hearts. Such love, such faith, such power of spirit can hardly have been witnessed in the world. Almost more wonderful than Terence's sacrifice, it seems to me, because to go to suffering that is unknown to your imagination is less difficult than to go to suffering of which every hideous moment is known, branded into the imagination and memory as is the suffering of hunger strike into hers. I think there is scarcely anything in the world for which I could do this. And no less wonderful than her power to do it is her power of doing is without regret, without bitterness, without self-pity, without impatience, day after day. She is without a hundred things that Terence

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had, without things that would give her ease. We are not nursing her as she should be nursed. We are all living our own noisy irresponsible lives, hardly hushing our voices for her sake. All day long, there must be things that make her suffer a little more that she need, but she does not think of that. She never asks us to be quiet for her sake. She smiles at us as we come in, and what she asks for she asks considerately, and thanks us lovingly and is troubled if we seem tired. "You are very

good", she said wistfully when I was leaving her this morning at 7.

We are assisting at the sacrifice of a heroic and beautiful life. I don't know how it is to be borne. ~~I want this woman for my friend. I want her to be in the world. I want her for Ireland, and they are going to let her die. My vigil was from 5-7am. I stayed a little late and she was conscious for me to go to bed.~~

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Mon 27th Nov

Today she is feverish. Bridie told the doctor. She says if that is so, this is the coming of the end. We have been hoping desperately day after day, and it has made us do less for her than we should have done. Today I meant to send a letter to the newspapers, challenging them about the false reports, but there is no way of getting it out. Her letter to the Cardinal and the Archbishop will go I hope today.ⁱⁱⁱ The Independent actually gives a true report, "She is very weak". Maybe the Doctor has done this. I wrote to Dr. Lynn through the censor asking for a lotion, pretending it was for myself – I think she will understand. I am to be in charge every day from 11-1 o' C. This will be a relief. Noreen, Cecilia and Lili are to take afternoon duty. We all realise we shall be nursing dying woman now.

p. 52 The Prisoners Council

Mon 27th Nov

We summoned a full meeting at 2.30. Noreen in the chair. All came, Bridie is in a more reasonable frame of mind. A Cuman na mBan meeting had been held first at which Lily attended and cleared the air. Our meeting

was very frank; the real issue was faced and all went well. No objection was made and a counsel of three was chosen. Lily O' Brennan, Brigid O' Mullane, Ms. Cogley - a very fair and satisfactory result, I thought. I am particularly glad Noreen is on.

I came in a little early from exercise and went into Miss MacSwiney. She was lying in the dim light, miserable, unsmiling. I knew her sister was on her mind. I had just seen the letter from Annie which she had sent us to read; an account of Thursday night, when the soldier attacked her like savages, yelling,

p. 53 Annie Mac Swiney Letter Mon 27th Nov
tore down her screens; threatened with bayonets the girls who guarded her, and even forced her at last to save the girls lives to go away. It was a horrible story. Demoralization would not go farther than it has gone in those wild hearts of men. And after days of hunger strike, as Miss MacSwiney said in terrible distress, her sister would not be fit for all that shock.

The most dreadful thought is that a time must come when her peace of mind and contentment will be gone and she will lie unsmiling as now I think she is trying to shorten it all for her sister's sake. Even the nurse to massage her, the one relief left to her, she refuses now.

With a heart stifled with sorrow, not able to say any encouraging thing, I left the room. The people of Ireland could save her, and they are letting her die.

p.54 Release Mon 27th Nov

It was after the gas was lighter and after tea, when we were settled in one another's cells that the rumour came. The Governor and some man Dr. O' Connor and a strange Doctor are coming up. The one continual dread seized us; they were going to remove her to another part of the prison, take her away from us. That was a thing we were not going to allow. We were prepared to fight to the death rather than that. Or it might be...somebody said the word breathlessly - release. "It is release", Davy cried in the door. Release! Joy like that, coming so sudden after such despair is a thing one hardly remembers afterwards. It vanishes from the memory as does violent pain. I only remember our looking at one another speechlessly, a sense of light - light shining out of faces and wide open eyes. But we knew we must be

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Mon 27th Nov

quiet. We crept upstairs. Sheila was coming out of her room, radiant as a Seraph. We stood tense and silent against the walls, then stole down again. Lily went into her and came down. Miss MacSwiney had told her she was not equal to it...to excitement...and sent her away. We lined up on the landing against the wall. We were to give her a silent military salute. The stretcher bearers went up. Bridie and Rita were called up to move the altar. I brought Kathleen O' Carroll out from her bed - maybe it was bad for her but she must have it to remember this splendid hour - and put her among us on a chair. Sheila came down and said she wanted after all to say goodbye, to see every one of us. "Too happy, faint with happiness, she was", Sheila said, "like

a child". We said we would stand as we were and the stretcher would be carried past. At last the men on the landing stooped. We saw them lifting

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Mon 27th Nov

the stretcher on their shoulders. They carried it slowly on the stairs and on the landing they stopped. She was lying motionless but then she held out her hand. One after another stole up and kissed her. She looked up smiling, intensely happy. It seemed a terrible [throne/thing] and I was afraid for her and didn't go near, but it was difficult. Then they lifted her again, and turned down the stairs while we leaned over the banisters watching. A dreadful moment came - they were carrying her head foremost, and the stairs were so steep that the blood would surely rush to her head. She moaned suddenly, "O let me get up and walk". I was frightened - somebody held on to me- but I was not going to scream. At last, they reached the foot of the stairs and set her down. She lay so still. I thought for a moment she might be dead. To die then, before the gate!

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Mon 27th Nov

But then she moved her head. Sheila went down and came up again. She was all right. Then they carried her away. The others said the rosary then, but I went to Kathleen O Carroll who was sobbing wildly in her bed. It was only a result of the excitement and I had her laughing soon.

There was hilarious celebration of course then. Some climbed to the window of the Humphrey's cell and

shouted and cheered until a sentry fired. They cheered more loudly and wildly than before. Some raided Miss MacSwiney's room for souvenirs – a bit of pumice stone was my share of loot. They danced and laughed and carried Miss Humphrey's shoulders high. I opened shortbread and tinned coffee and prepared a feast. Then for a moment, I was alone in her white empty cell. It was

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Mon 27th Nov

comforting to kneel by that bed where one had knelt watching such suffering and bury one's head in that pillow and give thanks and be at peace.

But now that she has gone all that made this prison glorious is gone. I don't want to be here. I want to escape. It is a prison...prison...and I may be kept a year. But it will be a thing to be thankful for always, to have been here through this, nursing her, and to have seen this holy victory won.

p.59 In Memory Tues 28th Nov

The memory of it now has a strange quality - not all pain; a sweet anguish, an aching beauty are in it. I know at last what the old word “glory” means. It means the great pride and wonder that can exist only with danger or sacrifice or pain. Remembering easy contented days, only dulled with moods of loneliness or soured a little with unkind words. These days when our hearts were half breaking with love and pity, when we saw human love and endurance at their highest, held tense and resistant night and day, these in spite of the pain, the days when life was most desirable.

p.60

Afterwards

Tues 28th Nov

I have often heard that there is nothing one misses so much as a patient one has nursed. Certainly, this patient is missed, missed, so that one looks around bewildered at a new world, and finds it prison. While she was here this was where one wanted to be. Now that she is gone it is all changed. Life has moved away and left us here in a waste space. Soon, in a day or two, we will try to make it habitable and become interested and happy at that, but now there is nothing but missing her and her need of us and her keen desire to know everything that concerned us and her courage and her loving words and welcoming smile. When shall I see her again?

p.61

Tues 28th Nov

Mrs. Humphries is troubled. She misses Miss MacSwiney's strength. She has been swayed to and fro since the bishops pastoral. To give up holy communion seems to her the worst thing in the world and a deprivation inflicted upon God. To her obedience to the Pastors, even when her conscience is in conflict with theirs, would be the greater virtue (a doctrine which seems to me to make a religion for slaves). But she is so deeply involved in the Republican movement now, with her son and daughter, that she cannot bring herself to renounce it. Instinct more pleasing to her Maker, I dare say, than her conscience lets her think. Miss MacSwiney, she said, by her grand strength made all seem clear, "She in her weakness was giving strength to us". It is true that spiritual strength, which

may be is in full health a little over bearing here,
shining through physical frailness and dependence was
a miracle-working thing.

p.69 Letter from Miss MacSwiney^{iv} Wed 29th Nov

To Mrs Humphries for us all, the women had on
Sunday, walked 9 times round the walls of Mountjoy
praying for her release.

The fall of Jericho.

Chocolates from Honor

p. 62 Victory Tues 28th Nov

(After end of book)

There is a sweetness in this victory greater than any
sweetness I have ever known. I think it is perhaps
because it means no defeat or hurt to any human
being, and because it is a victory of goodness over evil
in the hearts of Irish people. This has been the
despairing shame of the sorrow of these days, that it
seemed as if the people of Ireland had lost that living
spiritual sense which revolts against cruelty and
responds to suffering and is inspired by courage and
courageous moods. It has seemed as if that human
spirit, which is the breath of divinity in man was dying
out of them, and that soon only the animal [...] would
remain. The heroic spirit of Ireland would be dead. And
in the leaders who have induced the change in

p. 63 Tues 28th Nov

the people, it is as if all the spiritual force had turned
to malice and hardness and would never give way to
justice or mercy again.

That deadness and that malice were Miss McSwiney's enemies - these were keeping her here to die.

The only hope at all there was for her was in the weapon of her own pain. She was helpless. She could not nor would not hurt or harm her enemy in any way, only it would make the evilness of their apathy felt and known. Her challenge was to all that slumbered in this. She risked nothing but her own agony and her own death. The appeal of it was entirely to that thing in them which seemed so nearly dead; extinction if it could once be stirred to life again it might be saved from the struggle was between that death or the great living challenge that her suffering put forth. Whether the death

p.64

Tues 28th Nov

frost upon their spirits was so heavy that before her sacrifice had accumulated power enough to pierce it would have killed her. Would the minutes that pass so long, so slowly over her here or pass so quickly and unheeded in the distracted world outside slice her life before they had brought quickening to the others? Even if that happened, we knew her death would work the miracle. But now, without dying she has won justice, pity, chivalry at that great loving challenge, wakened again hardness gave way to compassion or to the fear at the least of doing wrong. Cruelty grew ashamed. Man and woman who had been in a mood of malice or indifference or cowardice let justice and valour waken in them again and paid tribute to truth once again. And having awakened they will not relapse

into that apathy so completely. The people of Ireland have been given life.

p.65 Books Wed 29th Nov

That prisoners should be sent books is apparently obvious to their friends is certainly true. But the books they send... Here, where each square foot of table space has to be stretched out as jealousy as a gold miners claim. I have the craziest collection of antiquated magazines, books on health and beauty, books on trades- unionism, race-course novels picked up on railway book stalls, old schoolbooks found in dusty corners of the house. It gives one a sense of being regarded as a pauper.

When I decide to read and to write out for exactly the books to be read here It becomes a most difficult and exciting question- of the myriad books in the world that I have never had time and never hoped to have time to read and have leisure for now; which are to be chosen?

Because there is so much leisure... long books, the long poems that I would have chosen in my academic days, 'The Ring and the Book' or 'The Faery Queen' or 'Paradise Lost'? No, not swift moving enough to entrance these tedious days.

Books finely written with the discretion of finish of consummate art, I desire. Life is so lax and rude here that one craves the company of master artists.

Books of activity, and adventurous colonized worlds remote from this stagnation, books of revolution, or foreign places, or

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Wed 29th Nov

great characters in them, great movements such as will not seem tame or trivial even beside the story Ireland is making today, or a fantastical history remote from all our world.

And famous books so that the reading of them add to the large pleasure there is in being intimate with the things the rest of the world knows and keeps as its emblems and its types.

A good prisoner's family, mine -

Mother has sent me Machiavelli's History of Florence.

What book in the world would it be better to read here? I know enough of Florence to long to know more, and it is the first foreign city I will live in when my time for travel comes, and maybe I shall discover a [theme for] and the play like 'The Gift' – and Machiavelli will be fascinating to meet...

p.68

Wed 29th Nov

Donald has sent me, 'The Gadfly', a book of Italian Revolution; the [likeliest] movement to ours, in the most different setting and a place and time in which from reading about Mazzini and Garibaldi, I know enough to understand. I read it long ago and remember the intensity of the book and remember the Gadfly himself, but all his history I forget. It will be good to meet him again.

From Iseult, Dostoevsky's 'White Nights' the most absorbing of writers, most perfect of artists in Russia and the strange subtle Russian thought.

And Mona has sent me Don Quixote!

Whether I shall love him as others do, I can't guess-
here I enter a really unknown world- now feel I like
some watcher of the Skies....

Praise be to all makers of good books!

They have a prisoner's prayers.

p.43 Obedience Wed 29th Nov

I wonder whether this is not the worst force in the
world-the system which brings intelligent men and
women into organisations which demand on the
abnegation of their own judgement and obedience in
all things to authority. Where this organisation is a
religion, as the Roman Catholic Church, the results are
such deplorable manifestations as the recent Pastoral,
and of the desertion by convinced Republicans of the
Republican cause. They cease to speak and work for
the thing in which they believe. When the organization
is militarist, it may result in such appalling
demoralisation as we see here today, when the mere
habit of obedience induces thousands of good-hearted
Irishmen to become the instruments by which

p.44 Wed 29th Nov

treachery, murder and dishonor beyond remedy are
committed and to think themselves innocent - without
the soldiers this reign of traitors would be impossible.
Erskine Childers would not be executed. Mary
MacSwiney would not die. They make it possible and
believe they keep their innocence still. Did they feel
this responsibility truly for one day they would put an
end to it, they are saturated with the slavery of
obedience and it goes on.

6th Dec

Patsie Woods has been forbidden to write to me and send me messages and she obeys! Patsie who has loved me when she was three years old and wrote to me three times without...an answer here and sent me a pack of cards. I worshiped her father when I was a little girl. A queer obedience this.

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Monday 27: Miss MacSwiney released

Kerry girls arrived.

Tues 28: Question of cooking our own food.

Entertainment in 10- charades.

Honor Murphy released.

Wed 29: Parcels- cups and saucers- little tea knives and spoons- clean clothes – books- civilizations.

Now our prison life begins.

The hand-painted Doctor –

That you may have a son a Bishop!

I don't care a Paudeen!

Sayings of the day: I would give a ham sandwich to hear a bird sing.

Miss MacSwiney's condition

Report from Mountjoy

Nov 22nd (19 day of hunger strike)

A discreditable attempt is being made with the assistance of the press, to deceive the public as to Miss MacSwiney's condition. This false impression has been fostered within this prison by well- tutored nurses from Marlborough St., all who perseveringly see 'no change' in their patient's condition, although to inexperienced eyes significant and perturbing changes are only too apparent. "She is feeling dreadfully cold", one of us said. "She is always cold", was the answer. She had a collapse about 4 o'C", another watcher reported. "Her usual morning weakness", was the reply. Since Saturday as a protest against the exclusion of her sister, Miss MacSwiney has refused the administration of doctors and nurses. We, her fellow- prisoners, are now her only attendants. Nevertheless, the night- nurse, who sits by the surgery fire, refusing even to fill the water bottles for Miss MacSwiney which we bring down, writes the medical reports. We have little doubt that they are false reports such as will be useful to the Free State propagandists if they fall as low as did the English by spreading rumors that the patient is taking food, or as documentary evidence at an inquest.

We, Miss Mac Swiney's only attendants have carefully noted and compared our observations and wish to record them with all possible accuracy, avoiding exaggeration.

Her vitality during the first 14 or 15 days seemed to us remarkable, she conversed, read, and wrote letters and although her voice and movements grow faint each day and the periods in which she could exert herself shorter and the exhaustion which followed a more distressing, her mind was alert, cheerful and at peace. Since Saturday her agitation about her sister has [...] an acute change, especially observable at night, when the suffering so bravely concealed during the day is betrayed by pitiful [...] in sleep and by restlessness in the long hours while she lies awake. We can see she is struggling against extreme weakness. That anxiety about her sister is a consuming obsession. Her temperature is constantly sub normal. Her pulse is very weak. In the last couple of days, it has fallen as low as 63.

None of us have experience of nursing cases of hunger - strike or can say how long this starved suffering, exhausted body can retain life. In the case of a woman, we suppose that

the end will come suddenly in one of their early morning collapses. When that crisis comes, we can do nothing, for we are pledged not even to [admin a stimulant to her]. We wait for her, daily, hourly, the opening of the gates, either of this prison, or of death.

(Signed)

Lili o' Brennan

Dorothy Macardle

Cecelia Gallagher

Brigid O' Mullane

ⁱⁱ Newspaper Cutting dates November 25, 1922. Miss M. MacSwiney. T.D. *Sister Returns to the Prison Gates*.

NOVEMBER 25, 1922.

MISS M. MacSWINEY. T.D.

SISTER RETURNS TO THE PRISON GATES

Miss Annie MacSwiney, who was removed from outside Mountjoy Prison on Thursday, and who was taken to a private nursing home returned to the prison gates yesterday evening.

She arrived in a cab, and took up a position on the N.C.R. outside the outer gate of the prison avenue where she is provided with a camp bed surrounded by a screen. Here she was visited during the afternoon by friends.

No change is reported in the condition of Miss M. MacSwiney, who completed her 21st day on hunger strike this morning.

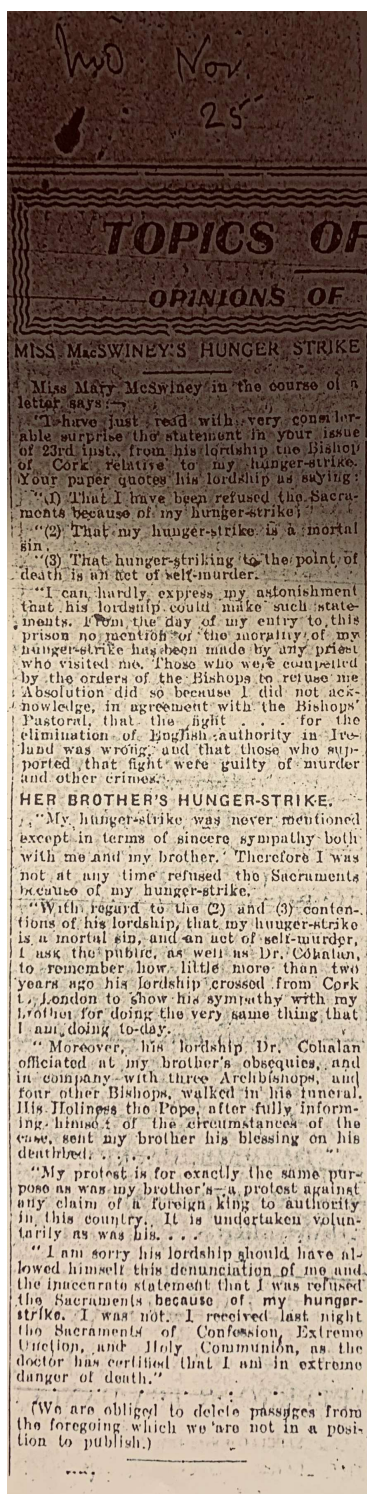
REQUESTS FOR RELEASE.

A petition to the Government for the release of Miss M. MacSwiney is lying at the offices of the I.I.D.A., Cork, and has already been signed by many leading citizens of all political beliefs.

The Executive of the I.W.W.U. passed a resolution protesting against the detention of uncharged and untried prisoners, and calling for the release of Miss MacSwiney.

Waterford Co. Council and Nenagh R.D.C. and Guardians passed resolutions calling on the Government to release 'is

iii Newspaper cutting dated November 25th 1922. Miss MacSwiney's Hunger Strike.



iv Copy of letter from Miss MacSwiney to Ms Humphries. Wed Nov. 29th

(Transcribed by Dorothy Macardle)

My Dear Angels,

For that is indeed what you were to me for the past fortnight especially- angles of loving kindness and unceasing prayer and vigil. I can never thank you all enough. I could not write

yesterday - -was honestly too weak and am doing it now sub rosa, after getting the doctor off my hands. It won't be a long letter but I wish I could tell you all I feel. The one drop of regret was leaving you all behind, but b le dé (buíochas a bheith Dia), it won't be long.

You remember the story of the fall of Jericho. How the jews had to walk round 7 times praying and singing psalms.

Well on Sunday the women's procession walked round Mountjoy 7 times- they had done it once every night- saying the rosary- you did the singing and on Monday the Gates fell.

[...buíochas le dei go deo]

How is poor little Kathleen? It is a shame to have her there suffering like that.

Nell dear I am so sorry for bringing away the blankets. It was stupid. They would have been so much nicer for you, but we can send them back, I hope only for a short time.

Mme O.R has called twice but I have not been allowed to see her. I left special word this morning that she was to come up but the doctor had not arrived and the doctor had not arrived and the nurse in charge who got the message said she couldn't come after all that long journey over.

I was terribly done up on Monday night after the move between the joy and triumph and excitement and weakness you wouldn't give much for me. Then my internal organs went on a strike of their own evidently- I suppose on a principle of 'he who will not when he may - when he wills he will have [nay]'. Anyhow the result for about 20 hours was that I almost wished myself on hungerstrike again.

I am much better today b.le.dia and expect to join Annie soon. She came into see me for 12 mins on Monday night and promptly did a proper faint when she went out. But she is getting better fast b.le d. It is now that the excitement is over and that more effort is required of her that she will feel it. How are you all since? Write to me and tell me every bit about yourselves. Sighle, now that you no longer act as secretary in one sense, you can do it in another.

I wish I could thank you all as I should for being so good to me. But you know don't you? That vigil was wonderful. That anyhow is one, was one, act of Cosgraves which will stand to his credit. It meant so much to us all, that I am going to pray harder than ever for his conversion. I still believe too that Paddy has a streak of good in him somewhere though we did not see so much of it. Never mind! I would rather convert them than disgrace them, but judging from

the state of some letters which went out from Mountjoy they seem to be as much afraid of prayers as the devil is of Holy Water.

I was disappointed not to see not to see that altar coming out- only the picture. It had to make way for my stretcher. I know it is up again now and that you are doing daily vigil instead of night but it will be more distracting, if less hard on you. I shall be with you in spirit. I have not yet heard who the eighteen new arrivals are. I suppose they were glad to get my cell free to pack a couple in there.

I am timing my rosaries with yours and hope to be able to continue it till I am well and ready to work again, by which time I hope you will be out. If you make any change, tell me. Last evening on Monday, I was with you from 6-9 listening to Ms Cogley and that glorious Ave Maria and the choir as well. I thank you all again a 1000 times.

Le ghrá mór

Máire

Remember me to all the nurses and Wardresses. They were very kind

Máire