

Evening Memories

(By WILLIAM O'BRIEN.)

CHAPTER XXIII.—(Continued.)

It is time to let the reader know something of the occurrences which gave the member for Manchester's joyous wit its chance, and tickled his admirers into "roars of laughter." Be it borne in mind that the publication of the facts was forced upon me as the only means of refuting a gross official untruth which was uttered behind my back, and the text of which I was not even permitted to see. As it is the last occasion on which it will be necessary to dwell upon distressing personal details, since the Manchester-Clonmel episode marked the final overthrow* of the programme of prison frightfulness divulged by Mr. Balfour at Clonmel, a lengthy extract from the statement which Mr. Healy took from my lips at the time in Clonmel prison will, one may hope, be forgiven:

"About eleven o'clock a.m., on the morning after my arrival in Clonmel prison, the chief warden, Gough, entered my cell, and said 'Come to the Doctor.' I followed him to a wide open court, stone paved. A gentleman was standing at a high desk in this open corridor. He did not salute me, nor in any way inform me who he was. His first words were 'open your vest.' I was obliged to ask him 'Are you the prison doctor?' He said, 'Yes,' and drew out his stethoscope. I opened my vest, and he placed the stethoscope to my chest on the right and left side, as well as I can remember, without asking to have my shirt opened. He next said, 'Have you a cough?' I said, 'I should be very sorry to be personally discourteous, but owing to the perversion on a former occasion of my communications with the prison doctor in Tullamore, I have no means of protecting myself against misrepresentation, unless to decline to make any communication as to my health, but you are at perfect liberty to examine me in every way you choose.' He said, 'that does not matter; open your shirt; your shirt is too stiff.' I then opened my shirt, and he examined me with another instrument—I believe a binaural stethoscope—after which he said, 'put out your tongue.' I did so. He then struck me lightly on the stomach, and without another word put up his instrument. I had to ask him, 'is that all?' He said, 'Yes,' and I turned back to the cell with the chief warden, who had been a witness of the examination, and who, like the doctor and myself, was standing in the corridor during the examination.

"About five minutes afterwards the chief warden returned to my cell and said, 'We must force you to put on the prison clothes.' I asked to see the governor, who appeared to have been waiting outside the door, for he immediately appeared. I said, 'I have to ask that a doctor shall be present during any attack upon me.' He said, 'I cannot do that; you have passed the doctor.' 'Then,' I said, 'you will have to strip me by force,' or words to that effect. I placed my back to the further wall of the cell; three warders immediately rushed at me with the chief warden. The four seized me, and a violent struggle took place between us, the governor standing by. They succeeded after a struggle in flinging me on my back on the floor, dragging my clothes away meanwhile. When I was down one man placed his knee on my chest, not, as I believe, brutally, but with a pressure that caused me considerable suffering. I heard someone, I think the chief warden, say 'Don't hurt him.' The pressure was then relaxed, and I struggled to my feet again, and renewed the struggle, while my clothes were being torn off one by one. I was then flung a second time on the floor, this time

on my face. I continued to struggle with all my force, while they were dragging prison clothes on me, and from the struggle and exhaustion, I became so faint that they had twice to cease, in order to give me a drink of water. During this second struggle my strength was totally exhausted. I heard the governor give the order to have my hair and beard taken off, and I remember the first few dashes made at me with a scissors. After that I lost consciousness, and when I recovered, found my mouth full of hairs, and was propped up on a stool between two warders who still held my arms. The governor said, 'Surely you have resisted enough now; you know it has to be done.' I said to him, 'You know little of me if you do not know that the struggle is only beginning now. The instant my hands are free, I will fling these clothes off again.'

"The warders having followed Alderman Hackett to the door, I instantly threw off the prison clothes. Three of them rushed at me again, and another struggle took place. They succeeded in forcing on some of the prison clothes again, seizing and twisting my arms all the time. In consequence of my resistance the chief warden told them not to mind forcing on the coat or vest this time. I again became so faint that they again put water on my lips, but continued to hold my arm while I stood leaning against the wall for a considerable time. So far as I can estimate the scene had by this time lasted half an hour.

"The warders continued to hold me for a long time, when the chief warden said 'Bring him along' and I was immediately dragged to the door in my shirtsleeves, and with my feet naked. No intimation was given me that I was being brought to be weighed. Up to this moment the question of weighing had never been mentioned to me, either by the doctor or by the warders, and I should never have made the slightest objection if I had known that that was their object. I was dragged across a large space, which I since learned was the main hall of the prison. At the moment I was so stupefied, and my bad sight made me so helpless (my spectacles having been taken from me during the struggle and not returned), that I had only the most confused notion of where I was being taken; my impression was that I was being dragged to a punishment cell. I said to the warders who had a hold of my arms again and again, 'Where are you dragging me to?' They made no reply, but dragged me on to what I now believe was a weighing machine, beside which the governor and doctor were standing. My legs and arms were dragged about the machine in an exceedingly painful way, and I then said, 'As long as you are treating me in this barbarous fashion, I will submit to nothing except by force.' The governor said, 'take him away.' They apparently gave up the attempt to weigh me.

"I was then dragged, still by the arms, in the opposite direction towards another cell, still under the impression that I was being brought to some other punishment. I was thrust into a cell in a different part of the prison, in which there was nothing except a stool.

"The moment I was left alone I threw off the prison clothes, and retained only a shirt. They made no further attempt to force the clothes on me. . . . I was left alone the entire day and evening. I remained until eight p.m. walking up and down the cell, with no covering except the shirt. The day was bitterly cold, and my teeth chattering, but I procured some warmth by lying on the floor, close to the hot-water pipes. I was unable to eat, but drank as much of the milk as I could. At eight o'clock, the usual hour for going to bed, a warden opened the door and put in a plank bed, without a mattress of any kind. He also brought in two single blankets and a quilt. I put one of the blankets on the plank, and the other, with the quilt, over me, and lay down. I did not sleep throughout the night. It was bitterly cold. I got my head on the hot-water pipes and utilised that as a pillow (none being supplied with the plank). About half an hour afterwards—namely, about a quarter to nine a.m., as far as I can calculate—the governor and chief warden entered my cell. The governor said, 'you will kill yourself if you go on like this.' I said, 'If I am killed I will take good care it is not I who will have the responsibility.' He said, 'You must know that there are prisoners who refuse to take food, and we are obliged to force them by putting mechanical restraints on them.' I said, 'There is not

* Since the above lines were penned, thirty-one years after the episodes of Manchester and Clonmel gaol, so incorrigible are the ways of England's Chief Secretaries, precisely the same story of senseless barbarities followed by shabby surrender in face of an unconquerable resistance, was repeated in the case of the memorable hunger strike of 85 Sinn Féin prisoners in Mountjoy gaol, April, 1920. The description of Mr. Arthur Griffith, M.P., of the prison policy of Mr. Macpherson in 1920 as an attempt "to treat all political offenders as common criminals with the threat to murder them if they refuse this status" is, *nomine mutato*, no less true of the policy of Mr. Balfour a generation before.