

CHAPTER THE ELEVENTH

THOUGHTS IN PRISON

Part 1

The first night in prison she found it impossible to sleep. The bed was hard beyond any experience of hers, the bed-clothes coarse and insufficient, the cell at once cold and stuffy. The little grating in the door, the sense of constant inspection, worried her. She kept opening her eyes and looking at it. She was fatigued physically and mentally, and neither mind nor body could rest. She became aware that at regular intervals a light flashed upon her face and a bodiless eye regarded her, and this, as the night wore on, became a torment...

Capes came back into her mind. He haunted a state between hectic dreaming and mild delirium, and she found herself talking aloud to him. All through the night an entirely impossible and monumental Capes confronted her, and she argued with him about men and women. She visualized him as in a policeman's uniform and quite impassive. On some insane score she fancied she had to state her case in verse. "We are the music and you are the instrument," she said; "we are verse and you are prose."

"For men have reason, women rhyme
A man scores always, all the time."

This couplet sprang into her mind from nowhere, and immediately begot an endless series of similar couplets that she began to compose and address to Capes. They came teeming distressfully through her aching brain:

"A man can kick, his skirts don't tear;
A man scores always, everywhere.

"His dress for no man lays a snare;
A man scores always, everywhere.
For hats that fail and hats that flare;
Toppers their universal wear;
A man scores always, everywhere.

"Men's waists are neither here nor there;
A man scores always, everywhere.

"A man can manage without hair;
A man scores always, everywhere.

"There are no males at men to stare;
A man scores always, everywhere.

"And children must we women bear--

"Oh, damn!" she cried, as the hundred-and-first couplet or so presented itself in her unwilling brain.

For a time she worried about that compulsory bath and cutaneous diseases.

Then she fell into a fever of remorse for the habit of bad language she had acquired.

"A man can smoke, a man can swear;
A man scores always, everywhere."

She rolled over on her face, and stuffed her fingers in her ears to shut out the rhythm from her mind. She lay still for a long time, and her mind resumed at a more tolerable pace. She found herself talking to Capes in an undertone of rational admission.

"There is something to be said for the lady-like theory after all," she admitted. "Women ought to be gentle and submissive persons, strong only in virtue and in resistance to evil compulsion. My dear--I can call you that here, anyhow--I know that. The Victorians over-did it a little, I admit. Their idea of maidenly innocence was just a blank white--the sort of flat white that doesn't shine. But that doesn't alter the fact that there IS innocence. And I've read, and thought, and guessed, and looked--until MY innocence--it's smirched.

"Smirched!...

"You see, dear, one IS passionately anxious for something--what is it?
One wants to be CLEAN. You want me to be clean. You would want me to be clean, if you gave me a thought, that is....

"I wonder if you give me a thought....

"I'm not a good woman. I don't mean I'm not a good woman--I mean that I'm not a GOOD woman. My poor brain is so mixed, dear, I hardly know what I am saying. I mean I'm not a good specimen of a woman. I've got a streak of male. Things happen to women--proper women--and all they have to do is to take them well. They've just got to keep white. But I'm always trying to make things happen. And I get myself dirty...

"It's all dirt that washes off, dear, but it's dirt.

"The white unaggressive woman who corrects and nurses and serves, and is worshipped and betrayed--the martyr-queen of men, the white mother....
You can't do that sort of thing unless you do it over religion, and there's no religion in me--of that sort--worth a rap.

"I'm not gentle. Certainly not a gentlewoman.

"I'm not coarse--no! But I've got no purity of mind--no real purity of

mind. A good woman's mind has angels with flaming swords at the portals to keep out fallen thoughts....

"I wonder if there are any good women really.

"I wish I didn't swear. I do swear. It began as a joke.... It developed into a sort of secret and private bad manners. It's got to be at last like tobacco-ash over all my sayings and doings....

"Go it, missie,' they said; "kick aht!"

"I swore at that policeman--and disgusted him. Disgusted him!

"For men policemen never blush;
A man in all things scores so much...

"Damn! Things are getting plainer. It must be the dawn creeping in.

"Now here hath been dawning another blue day;
I'm just a poor woman, please take it away.

"Oh, sleep! Sleep! Sleep! Sleep!"

Part 2

"Now," said Ann Veronica, after the half-hour of exercise, and sitting on the uncomfortable wooden seat without a back that was her perch by day, "it's no good staying here in a sort of maze. I've got nothing to do for a month but think. I may as well think. I ought to be able to think things out.

"How shall I put the question? What am I? What have I got to do with myself?...

"I wonder if many people HAVE thought things out?

"Are we all just seizing hold of phrases and obeying moods?

"It wasn't so with old-fashioned people, they knew right from wrong; they had a clear-cut, religious faith that seemed to explain everything and give a rule for everything. We haven't. I haven't, anyhow. And it's no good pretending there is one when there isn't.... I suppose I believe in God.... Never really thought about Him--people don't.. .. I suppose my creed is, 'I believe rather indistinctly in God the Father Almighty, substratum of the evolutionary process, and, in a vein of vague sentimentality that doesn't give a datum for anything at all, in Jesus Christ, His Son.'...

"It's no sort of good, Ann Veronica, pretending one does believe when

one doesn't....

"And as for praying for faith--this sort of monologue is about as near as any one of my sort ever gets to prayer. Aren't I asking--asking plainly now?...

"We've all been mixing our ideas, and we've got intellectual hot coppers--every blessed one of us....

"A confusion of motives--that's what I am!...

"There is this absurd craving for Mr. Capes--the 'Capes crave,' they would call it in America. Why do I want him so badly? Why do I want him, and think about him, and fail to get away from him?

"It isn't all of me.

"The first person you love, Ann Veronica, is yourself--get hold of that! The soul you have to save is Ann Veronica's soul...."

She knelt upon the floor of her cell and clasped her hands, and remained for a long time in silence.

"Oh, God!" she said at last, "how I wish I had been taught to pray!"

Part 3

She had some idea of putting these subtle and difficult issues to the chaplain when she was warned of his advent. But she had not reckoned with the etiquette of Canongate. She got up, as she had been told to do, at his appearance, and he amazed her by sitting down, according to custom, on her stool. He still wore his hat, to show that the days of miracles and Christ being civil to sinners are over forever. She perceived that his countenance was only composed by a great effort, his features severely compressed. He was ruffled, and his ears were red, no doubt from some adjacent controversy. He classified her as he seated himself.

"Another young woman, I suppose," he said, "who knows better than her Maker about her place in the world. Have you anything to ask me?"

Ann Veronica readjusted her mind hastily. Her back stiffened. She produced from the depths of her pride the ugly investigatory note of the modern district visitor. "Are you a special sort of clergyman," she said, after a pause, and looking down her nose at him, "or do you go to the Universities?"

"Oh!" he said, profoundly.

He panted for a moment with unuttered replies, and then, with a scornful gesture, got up and left the cell.

So that Ann Veronica was not able to get the expert advice she certainly needed upon her spiritual state.

Part 4

After a day or so she thought more steadily. She found herself in a phase of violent reaction against the suffrage movement, a phase greatly promoted by one of those unreasonable objections people of Ann Veronica's temperament take at times--to the girl in the next cell to her own. She was a large, resilient girl, with a foolish smile, a still more foolish expression of earnestness, and a throaty contralto voice. She was noisy and hilarious and enthusiastic, and her hair was always abominably done. In the chapel she sang with an open-lunged gusto that silenced Ann Veronica altogether, and in the exercising-yard slouched round with carelessly dispersed feet. Ann Veronica decided that "hoydenish ragger" was the only phrase to express her. She was always breaking rules, whispering asides, intimating signals. She became at times an embodiment for Ann Veronica of all that made the suffrage movement defective and unsatisfying.

She was always initiating petty breaches of discipline. Her greatest exploit was the howling before the mid-day meal. This was an imitation of the noises made by the carnivora at the Zoological Gardens at feeding-time; the idea was taken up by prisoner after prisoner until the whole place was alive with barkings, yappings, roarings, pelican chatterings, and feline yowlings, interspersed with shrieks of hysterical laughter. To many in that crowded solitude it came as an extraordinary relief. It was better even than the hymn-singing. But it annoyed Ann Veronica.

"Idiots!" she said, when she heard this pandemonium, and with particular reference to this young lady with the throaty contralto next door.

"Intolerable idiots!..."

It took some days for this phase to pass, and it left some scars and something like a decision. "Violence won't do it," said Ann Veronica.

"Begin violence, and the woman goes under...."

"But all the rest of our case is right.... Yes."

As the long, solitary days wore on, Ann Veronica found a number of definite attitudes and conclusions in her mind.

One of these was a classification of women into women who are and women who are not hostile to men. "The real reason why I am out of place here," she said, "is because I like men. I can talk with them. I've

never found them hostile. I've got no feminine class feeling. I don't want any laws or freedoms to protect me from a man like Mr. Capes. I know that in my heart I would take whatever he gave....

"A woman wants a proper alliance with a man, a man who is better stuff than herself. She wants that and needs it more than anything else in the world. It may not be just, it may not be fair, but things are so. It isn't law, nor custom, nor masculine violence settled that. It is just how things happen to be. She wants to be free--she wants to be legally and economically free, so as not to be subject to the wrong man; but only God, who made the world, can alter things to prevent her being slave to the right one.

"And if she can't have the right one?

"We've developed such a quality of preference!"

She rubbed her knuckles into her forehead. "Oh, but life is difficult!" she groaned. "When you loosen the tangle in one place you tie a knot in another.... Before there is any change, any real change, I shall be dead--dead--dead and finished--two hundred years!..."

Part 5

One afternoon, while everything was still, the wardress heard her cry out suddenly and alarmingly, and with great and unmistakable passion, "Why in the name of goodness did I burn that twenty pounds?"

Part 6

She sat regarding her dinner. The meat was coarse and disagreeably served.

"I suppose some one makes a bit on the food," she said....

"One has such ridiculous ideas of the wicked common people and the beautiful machinery of order that ropes them in. And here are these places, full of contagion!

"Of course, this is the real texture of life, this is what we refined secure people forget. We think the whole thing is straight and noble at bottom, and it isn't. We think if we just defy the friends we have and go out into the world everything will become easy and splendid.

One doesn't realize that even the sort of civilization one has at Morningside Park is held together with difficulty. By policemen one mustn't shock.

"This isn't a world for an innocent girl to walk about in. It's a world of dirt and skin diseases and parasites. It's a world in which the law can be a stupid pig and the police-stations dirty dens. One wants helpers and protectors--and clean water.

"Am I becoming reasonable or am I being tamed?"

"I'm simply discovering that life is many-sided and complex and puzzling. I thought one had only to take it by the throat.

"It hasn't GOT a throat!"

Part 7

One day the idea of self-sacrifice came into her head, and she made, she thought, some important moral discoveries.

It came with an extreme effect of re-discovery, a remarkable novelty.

"What have I been all this time?" she asked herself, and answered, "Just stark egotism, crude assertion of Ann Veronica, without a modest rag of religion or discipline or respect for authority to cover me!"

It seemed to her as though she had at last found the touchstone of conduct. She perceived she had never really thought of any one but herself in all her acts and plans. Even Capes had been for her merely an excitant to passionate love--a mere idol at whose feet one could enjoy imaginative wallowings. She had set out to get a beautiful life, a free, untrammelled life, self-development, without counting the cost either for herself or others.

"I have hurt my father," she said; "I have hurt my aunt. I have hurt and snubbed poor Teddy. I've made no one happy. I deserve pretty much what I've got...."

"If only because of the way one hurts others if one kicks loose and free, one has to submit...."

"Broken-in people! I suppose the world is just all egotistical children and broken-in people."

"Your little flag of pride must flutter down with the rest of them, Ann Veronica...."

"Compromise--and kindness."

"Compromise and kindness."

"Who are YOU that the world should lie down at your feet?"

"You've got to be a decent citizen, Ann Veronica. Take your half loaf with the others. You mustn't go clawing after a man that doesn't belong to you--that isn't even interested in you. That's one thing clear.

"You've got to take the decent reasonable way. You've got to adjust yourself to the people God has set about you. Every one else does."

She thought more and more along that line. There was no reason why she shouldn't be Capes' friend. He did like her, anyhow; he was always pleased to be with her. There was no reason why she shouldn't be his restrained and dignified friend. After all, that was life. Nothing was given away, and no one came so rich to the stall as to command all that it had to offer. Every one has to make a deal with the world.

It would be very good to be Capes' friend.

She might be able to go on with biology, possibly even work upon the same questions that he dealt with....

Perhaps her granddaughter might marry his grandson....

It grew clear to her that throughout all her wild raid for independence she had done nothing for anybody, and many people had done things for her. She thought of her aunt and that purse that was dropped on the table, and of many troublesome and ill-requited kindnesses; she thought

of the help of the Widgetts, of Teddy's admiration; she thought, with a new-born charity, of her father, of Manning's conscientious unselfishness, of Miss Miniver's devotion.

"And for me it has been Pride and Pride and Pride!

"I am the prodigal daughter. I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him--

"I suppose pride and self-assertion are sin? Sinned against heaven--Yes, I have sinned against heaven and before thee....

"Poor old daddy! I wonder if he'll spend much on the fatted calf?...

"The wrapped life-discipline! One comes to that at last. I begin to understand Jane Austen and chintz covers and decency and refinement and all the rest of it. One puts gloves on one's greedy fingers. One learns to sit up...

"And somehow or other," she added, after a long interval, "I must pay Mr. Ramage back his forty pounds."