

A Letter

To the Committee of the
South African Women and
Children's Distress Fund.

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**To the Committee of the South African Women
and Children's Distress Fund.**

My recent voyage to South Africa, which should have ended in a visit to that country, was, like my former one of last year, undertaken by me on my own initiative and not in the least as your delegate, though I had hoped still to be of some use to you as a medium for forwarding supplies to the camps. I had naturally no expectation of revisiting the Concentration Camps, the Government having prohibited my return to that work, but I knew great need was arising amongst deported women of all nationalities scattered in the coast towns, and I thought you might be willing to extend help in this direction after full investigation. It was my desire above all to find out what real need still exists amongst the Uitlander refugees, whose sufferings I had been accused of neglecting, and help them from other funds if necessary. A slight account of my experiences may be acceptable to you, and will make clear the character of the difficulties to be overcome.

We dropped anchor in Table Bay at 4 p.m., Sunday, October 27. We were packed to go ashore and ready with the readiness of those who had been twenty-two days at sea. A tug came out to meet the ship, and the sight of khaki on board showed me that martial law had been proclaimed at Capetown. No hope, then, of landing that night, for the officer, Lieutenant Lingham, R.N., had to examine every individual passenger (some 450) before any might land. We passed in single file before him, and when it came to my turn he expressed a wish to speak to me at the end of all.

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The interview took place in Captain Brown's cabin, and in his presence. Captain Brown was master of U.C. Company's ship Avondale Castle, in which I had sailed. Mr. Lingham said: "I have to inform you that you are not to be allowed to land in Capetown, that you are to remain on the Avondale Castle, under strict supervision, that you are to hold no communication with anybody on shore either by word or letter, and that it is proposed you should return by the Carisbrooke Castle, leaving on Wednesday afternoon."

To Captain Brown he said: "You will be held responsible under martial law for guarding Miss Hobhouse; you are not to allow her to leave the ship or receive or speak to anyone from shore; you are not to allow her to send or receive letters."

I replied: "This appears to me a very extraordinary order and one requiring explanation. May I ask by whom such orders were issued?"

Mr. Lingham said: "I have received my orders from Colonel Cooper, acting Commandant of Capetown."

"And from whom did Colonel Cooper receive such orders?"

"Of that I can say nothing."

I said: "Are you aware that when I left England martial law had not been declared in Capetown?" I added it seemed incredible to me that people should be prevented from landing after such a voyage. To this he had nothing to say. I inquired if martial law also obtained at Durban, East London, and Port Elizabeth, as there were people I wished to relieve in those places. He said I should not be allowed to land anywhere in South Africa. I reiterated that it seemed to me most extraordinary treatment, the more so that he brought no warrant or statement of my offence nor gave me opportunity to defend myself or state my present reasons for visiting the country. Moreover, I could get no help, as he forbade communication with the shore. I quickly resolved to write to Colonel Cooper, and Mr. Lingham consented to bear the letter to his superior. I told him I should obey his orders to the letter, that being my first impulse until I understood better my position and what was against me and had opportunity of stating my case. Later, after reflection, I resisted what will always seem to me unwarrantable interference with my

liberty as a British subject. Notwithstanding other feelings, I could not help laughing when the officer said my nurse must be searched if she landed, the idea of nurse or even myself carrying incriminating documents was so very remote. I welcomed him heartily to have us both searched, but, as a matter of fact, this was never done, and we were glad to escape having our things rummaged.

I wrote as follows to Colonel Cooper:

Avondale Castle,
Oct 27.

To the Commandant, Capetown.

Dear Sir,—Lieutenant Lingham kindly undertakes to be the bearer of this note. It was a matter of immense surprise to me when that officer brought me your message forbidding me to land or hold communication with friends ashore, and stating that I was to be made a prisoner on board the ship. He had no reason to offer me for this communication, and he did not even wish to hear what my reasons were for visiting South Africa. I therefore deem it wisest and due to myself to approach you direct in order to gain some information concerning the matter. I could understand the rigour of martial law being applied to me if I had in the past taken or even now intended to take political part of any kind. But this I have never done. Both in South Africa and in England my words and work have been purely and consistently philanthropic in character. I have left politics severely alone. My intentions in revisiting South Africa were simply to carry on this philanthropic work amongst all classes of sufferers of all nationalities in the various coast towns where, when I left England, no martial law existed. I have been urged from end to end of England to ascertain the exact needs of the British refugees of whom so much has been heard, and I have come here simply for that purpose, being in a position to obtain considerable sums for them in England when I have been able to satisfy myself of the extent and nature of their needs. If we are to believe the outcries of the papers, much needs doing in that direction. Still if for any reason the Government objects to such useful and necessary work I am of course willing to forego it; but what objection can be offered to my living quietly in Capetown for a while where I have many old friends? I have been out of health, and shrinking from the cold of an English winter came to this warm climate. I do not feel equal to the strain of an immediate return voyage which you offer me, nor the alternative of remaining a prisoner on board the Avondale Castle. I am enclosing a letter which I earnestly ask you to convey to the Governor, also one to Lord Milner and one to Lord Kitchener. I must further appeal to you on behalf of my nurse, a young woman who came as my attendant and masseuse. She intended living with me while nursing the needy sick

under direction, and hoped eventually to settle in the country. Will you allow her to land, and be the bearer for me of a letter from Lady R. to Lady Hely-Hutchinson, also one from myself to that lady? In any case, I trust you will in the just exercise of your office give full attention to this letter. It cannot but seem to me that the summary arrest of an Englishwoman bound on works of charity, without warrant of any kind or stated offence, is a proceeding which requires explanation.—I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

E. HOBHOUSE.

I wrote also to Lord Milner and Lord Kitchener in similar strain, intimating that I could not believe they were cognisant of my arrest. And I appealed to Sir Walter Hely-Hutchinson, as England's representative in Cape Colony, to protect me. I asked Colonel Cooper also to read and forward a letter to a lady friend.

Next day the following reply was received from Colonel Cooper:

The Castle, Capetown,
October 28.

Madam,—I am in receipt of your letter of this date and regret it is not in my power to allow you to land in South Africa.

The letters you enclose will be forwarded as requested to the High Commissioner, the Commander-in-Chief, the Governor, and Mrs. —.

There is no objection to your nurse landing.—I am, Madam, your obedient servant,

H. COOPER,
Colonel Commandant.

The passengers for Capetown all landed that day (Monday) and on the Captain returning from shore in the evening I discussed the situation with him. He informed me he had orders to take the ship into dock next morning, and we agreed that in that case difficulties would arise, and I ought to have in writing the regulations imposed on me. He also wished me to give him my word to adhere to them, and at first I was willing, but after reflection I refused, feeling it was not right he should be my gaoler; the authorities ought to provide a guard. I therefore wrote the following letter to Colonel Cooper:

Avondale Castle,
October 28.

To the Commandant, Capetown,
Sir,—I have to thank you for your kindness in giving prompt reply to my letter, and am obliged to you for forward-

ing my enclosures. My nurse, with your permission, will land to-morrow, and take the letters (Lady R.'s and mine) to Lady Hely-Hutchinson. I feel it my duty to ask you to let me have in writing exactly the regulations to which you wish me to conform whilst a prisoner on this vessel. Word of mouth is vague at the best, and as we are moving into dock to-morrow, I can foresee many occasions may arise where it will be difficult to guide myself without written instructions. As we move early I should be obliged to receive these at once. Moreover, I conceive that it would be wiser to appoint a regular guard to see that I do not pass the limits of these regulations. May I ask you to send one for that purpose? A guard will be not only a satisfaction to your mind but he will be a witness also to my adhesion to your regulations, until such time as you see fit to intern me in a land prison.—I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

E. HOBHOUSE.

P.S.—Do you allow me to communicate with a washerwoman, or is uncleanness part of the régime to which I must submit? A bath here is also impossible.

The next day (Tuesday) brought a south-east gale, which kept us swaying and tossing in the Bay. The wind blew like great guns and cut off all communication with the shore. Having been unwell and sleepless, the day was very trying. Feeling disturbed and uncertain how to act, I sought the ship's library, in the hope of finding books which would show me how other people acted under similar circumstances. By a curious chance I hit upon a volume of Macaulay's history, and found some stimulus in reading again how Bishop Trelawny (who happens to be an ancestor of mine) resisted with his colleagues the despotism of James II. I wished I, too, had six companions, but except that he refused to pay the bill for his keep while under detention in the Tower, I could find no hint for my guidance.

The following morning (Wednesday) we moved into dock, and I was grateful to find that a few of my friends had bravely demanded permits to see me, and had succeeded. Evidently because the officials thought I should leave that evening by the Carisbrooke Castle. This I felt and told them was impossible.

A letter was brought me from the Governor:

Government House, Capetown,
October 28, 1901.

Dear Miss Hobhouse,—Your letter of yesterday was delivered to me this afternoon. I presume that you have

been detained on board the Avondale Castle under the powers conferred on the military authorities by martial law, and I will therefore lay your complaint before the General. In the meanwhile I may assure you that the care of the British refugees is in safe hands, and that you need have no anxiety on that account.—Yours faithfully,

WALTER HELY-HUTCHINSON.

At four o'clock Colonel Cooper asked to see me. The interview was short.

He said, "I am sorry, Miss Hobhouse, to make your acquaintance under these circumstances."

I said: "I am sorry, too."

There was silence awhile, then Colonel Cooper asked if I did not think it best to leave on the Carisbrooke that afternoon.

I replied as before that I felt unequal to it and needed rest; that no reason had been given me for my detention, and I knew of none which could warrant a proceeding so arbitrary on the part of the authorities. He inquired what then were my plans. I answered they had been to land and, after rest, do my work in the town, but now my plans appeared to be somewhat in his hands, that I should naturally prefer the alternative of remaining on the Avondale, where I knew the ship's crew, to being sent on board any other vessel in the Bay, until answers had come from Lords Milner and Kitchener, who I hoped were unaware of my arrest. If it would enhance the honour or add to the safety of England that I should be imprisoned I was willing, but I begged it might be a land prison. Until justice could be obtained any cell and any fare would do on land. Colonel Cooper remarked on the unpleasantness of a ship unloading in dock, noise, dirt, and smells prevailing. I assured him it was not my wish to remain in it, but disagreeable as it was anything was preferable to another immediate voyage. I further said it was incredible to me that English officers or Englishmen could insist on imposing on me a long sea voyage immediately following on a previous long voyage. I had not felt well since leaving England, was overdone when I embarked, my arrest had been a great shock, and I shrank from further strain; I considered that both in reason and justice I was entitled to rest if not to freedom.

The same evening Lieutenant Lingham came, mainly in reply to my letter demanding a guard rather

than the gaolership of the captain. He seemed to have some objection to this, and wished me to give my parole that I would not escape. I said it appeared to me a disagreeable and unfair position for Captain Brown, who was my personal friend, and that I could not understand interfering with people's liberty, detaining them in prison, and yet not taking the trouble to guard them. Giving my parole not to escape was tantamount to keeping myself in prison, and why should I do that? I was detained at their wish, not at my own. He said parole was a usual thing, and I answered I believed that was so only in quite different cases, for I understood people were let out of prison on parole, not detained thereby. Further, he was asking for a thing which by their own actions the authorities deemed worthless. I had told them repeatedly I had come on no political errand, that such work as I should do would be philanthropic merely and open to supervision. If, therefore, they refused to believe me or trust my word on shore, how could they trust my word afloat, the value being the same on land or sea. Mr. Lingham appeared to have no answer to this argument, but pressed for parole, though sorry to trouble me.

I assured him I attached no blame to him, regarding him merely as mouthpiece of a tyranny and injustice higher than himself. I inquired what alternative he proposed failing my parole, but this he refused to reveal beforehand.

Dreading therefore being forcibly placed on a strange ship out at sea I resolved to compromise by agreeing to give my parole until I received answers from Lords Milner and Kitchener, and then I must reconsider my position. The interview was protracted, but Mr. Lingham expressed himself satisfied with this, and departed.

I do not wish to dwell on my personal discomfort or suffering, but it is perhaps necessary to state that the shock and strain of the past three days on the top of a trying voyage and previous hard work now naturally resulted in collapse. This amounted to loss of power, muscular and nervous, so that physical and mental exertion became impossible for a time. It is the way in which reaction after undue strain shows itself in me. It would have been far easier, and in some respects pleasanter, for me to yield to their importunities, but I felt that a principle of public importance was at stake, and that I ought to suffer personal discomfort rather than acquiesce in its violation.

In spite of my parole a detective was left, who watched me closely, so next day I asked for his withdrawal.

Thursday, the 31st, was spent in continual interviews with officials which would be tedious to relate in detail. As I had been unable to sleep or eat they were sufficiently harassing to me.

A young officer was sent with a paper stating that a berth had been assigned to me on the Roslin Castle, and it would be necessary to embark that day. I was too unwell to read the paper. Later Mr. Lingham arrived and said a great deal which I was too weak to follow, and he read aloud something, the contents of which I did not grasp, but which he explained to be a telegram from the Commander-in-Chief, who, in agreement with the High Commissioner, ordered my immediate deportation. The officer told me the meaning of it, and I said "I am not strong enough to entertain the idea." This he demanded in writing, and I roused myself to scrawl a pencil note to Colonel Cooper, saying I was sorry I could not face the proposed voyage.

I must have dozed a little when he left, for when I next opened my eyes a lady was beside me, who had kindly sought leave to see me again, on the ground of trying to arrange for a laundress. (I may add that this was never done, and the return voyage of twenty-four days was undergone without that necessity). Her presence was a comfort, though from physical weakness I could not talk to her.

Later Mr. Lingham returned saying the orders must be carried out. My reply was necessarily the same, and that if left in peace to recover strength, I might be fit to take the mail the following week, if still compelled. He said he should then be obliged to use force. I answered, "I cannot help what you do; that is your affair; I can only judge what is right for myself to do. Why not take me on shore and hang me? Why torment me so?"

He pleaded his orders. I replied that I believed the whole British public would exonerate him if he refused to carry out such orders as forcing a sick, overwrought woman to take a long voyage without even a few days for rest.

A card was brought me with the name Lieutenant-Colonel Williamson; R.A.M.C., which I returned, saying I was too unwell to see a stranger. In a few minutes the owner thrust

himself upon me, saying he was medical officer, and had orders to examine me. In vain I refused examination by a stranger, saying I had asked to see my friend and medical man in Capetown. He would not go, and at length, for very weariness I submitted to a superficial examination. He said I had not heart disease, which I knew before. Under martial law the stewardesses were ordered to pack my clothes, and the chief officer was told to get my trunks from the hold. He rightly insisted on written orders before doing this.

Throughout I maintained the same attitude, that I did not feel able to go, that this made it more unjust I should go, but that I would do my best to be well enough for the mail should respite not come, and I would let Lord Kitchener know as soon as I felt fit. I said repeatedly I still had faith enough in English men and English officers to believe that they would not force a sick woman on a long journey against her will, and that I should retain that faith as long as possible.

Finally Dr. Williamson brought two Army nurses, Sisters MacKillan and Nicholson, to take me by force. The chief officer of the ship was present at my request, besides the military men, and I spoke quietly to the women asking them to lay no violent hands upon me. They answered they were under military orders, and this I said I understood, but I put before them that the laws of humanity and nature are, or should be, higher than military laws, and appealed to them not to mar their sacred office as nurses by molesting a sick woman. I had appealed in vain to the men, but hoped I should not appeal in vain to my own sex. Both Sisters turned, and silently left the room, and I thanked them as they went. They behaved like true English women. I was left alone.

It must have been an hour later, about 7 p.m., when Dr. Williamson returned, followed by two soldiers. He approached, and, touching me on the shoulder, said, "Will you yield to technico?" I said, "I don't know what you mean." He explained, "Will you yield of your own free will, otherwise there are the soldiers." I could only say, "Sir, I cannot and will not give other reply than what I have said from the beginning. My refusal was based on principle, and principles do not alter in a day; nor can they be frightened out of me by force. I am weak and ill, unfit to take this voyage. It is not a right thing in any case, and

especially unreasonable to ask it without giving me previous rest. I will not go one step voluntarily towards the Roslin Castle. I beg you to leave me."

"Madam," he said, "do you wish to be taken like a lunatic?"

"Sir," I replied, "the lunacy is on your side and with those whose commands you obey. If you have any manhood in you, you will go and leave me alone."

He signed to the soldiers to come forward. They looked at me and hesitated a moment, and I took the opportunity of appealing to them to afford me the same respect as they would like shown to their own wives and mothers in similar condition. One man turned and was making for the door when Dr. Williamson, fearful of losing his last chance, urged the other forward, and reluctantly they did their work. My shawl was wound round me, confining my arms, and I was forced on to the deck where several soldiers were waiting. They carried me away through the ship and on to the dock where a carriage was in readiness. I spoke a few words to the men who bore me, otherwise there was silence. The stars were brilliant, and the fresh night air revived me a little. At the dock where the Roslin lay I was asked to board her voluntarily, but I refused as a matter of principle. Even had I possessed the strength to do so I would not move one step towards the vessel. My whole strength was centred in the resolution to refuse acquiescence in the injustice of the order, and for the time it deprived me of power in other ways. Orderlies were summoned who carried me, as before, to a cabin, where I lay till placed under charge of Colonel Clowes, officer in command of the transport, whom I begged to release me or appeal to Colonel Cooper to do so. He spoke kindly, and said he would see Colonel Cooper in the morning.

Next morning the medical man I had wished to see succeeded with difficulty in getting a permit, not, however, until too late; when he arrived the vessel was gliding from the quay.

The voyage took twenty-four days, and my weak condition at starting made it one of great suffering for me, lightened only by the devotion of my nurse; there was no stewardess on board.

My nurse, Miss Phillips, altered her plans and most unselfishly refused to leave me, judging me unfit to be left to strangers.

From the moment I was arrested till the present time, I have never been informed what was the ground of complaint against me, or by whose original authority I was subjected to the treatment I have described.

On reviewing the case I believe that I did right in protesting throughout against the proceedings of the soldiers, and in continuing my resistance to the last, though it was purely passive resistance, excepting in so far as I resented having my shawl bound about me. If it be thought that in any respect I could have acted better, let it be remembered that I had no one to advise me. Neither have I any knowledge of law, except that I fancied I was a free woman in a free country, and my fixed idea was to do nothing which could give ground for saying that I acquiesced in what was done to me.

I think it right to add that tyrannical and lawless as I believe the action of the responsible authorities to have been, I have no general complaint to make of the mode in which their subordinates carried their orders into effect. In one or two particulars they might have been more considerate, but on the whole they performed as gently as could be expected the very disagreeable task imposed on them.—I have, &c.,

E HOBHOUSE.

LONDON, December 2, 1901.