

February 17, 1925.

*Bridgewater Hospital for Criminal Insane*

DEAR COMRADE BLACKWELL:

It has been very hard for me this forced silence, yet, for a while I have been unable to get paper, and after a while I had been compelled to spend my weekly letters (2) for answering my family and others, for urgent necessities. This is a special letter which I asked after having received your dear Valentine. Indeed, it seems that almost all have stopped to write to me, since my coming here—for, except some mail addressed to Charlestown, which I received the first week of my new residence (not surely Royal) I have received but one from Mrs. M—— who promised to visit me, but has not yet come; few other missives from a friend family, and your letter and post card.

I have not answered to those who cheered me the last Christmas and New Years. Nor have I been able to answer to the last heartfelt letter of our great Eugene Debs. And just think—I am knowing myself—I wish so intensely to tell him my ideas of the Italian conditions and other things. Also to you I would like to tell.

I am not allowed to use paper or write. This intellectual compelled idleness is crucial to me, now that so many ideas whirling in my brain and sentiments into my being, give me a yearning for expression—most all because of my understanding of the nature and needs of our times.

Lately, I read in a review, a few letters of Eliseo

Reclus, written while he was in prison for a 1st of May demonstration in Paris. These beautiful letters, though brief and familiar, voice the genius of their author. Could I translate them in English!

Because here the visits are allowed daily, I have seen many dear friends and their children since I am here and they brought me some particular Italian dish. A festival of the heart and of the stomach. They are doing to me what Caserio, the killer of Carnot, used to do with the more poorer than he; baker and anarchist, he spent all his money to give them some bread, and some books, "the bread of the spirit," as that hero used to say. . . .

I hope I will be able to fulfill my promise to you, about my mother, in the near future, and to send you writings which may interest you. . . .

April 4, 1925.

*Bridgewater Hospital for Criminal Insane*

DEAR COMRADE DONOVAN:<sup>1</sup>

This very sheet of paper tells you that I have received your two copies of *The Nation* which you promised to me in your letter of March 30th. Much obliged, comrade Donovan, for the papers and more for your letter, which came to me as a flash of light. . . .

So, you are studying Dante's language, and will

<sup>1</sup> Mary Donovan, at this time an industrial inspector for the Massachusetts Department of Labor and Industries, became recording secretary of the Defense Committee in 1924.

write to me in the "*Idioma gentil sonante e puro*" of the "*Bel Paese aue il 'si' suona*"? Very well—I proudly congratulate you. There is something in the Italian literature worth while reading, studying and ponderating by every person of good will—not mentioning a revolutionist. And of this we shall speak later. Of Dostoyevsky, I only have read some letters—'til then unedited, published by the *Culture* issue of June 1924. So I am most eager to read his *Poor People*. Next I would read his *Prisons*. And I believe that it would suffice to give me a proper idea of this famous writer's spirit and soul. Next I will ask for the Barkman's *Memories* in Italian translation. I have already read twice *My Prisons* by Silvio Pellico, which and who you may know. I think that I could have something to say on this subject, some future day, and it is the reason why I wish to learn what others have said upon the topic. I will also pray my friends to order for me some of the books—very interesting—which I have seen in the book of *The Nation* at five cents each. Now I have *Resurrection* by Leo Tolstoi and an American volume of poems to read. *The Nation* is a reading issue. A good mental diversion and stimulation to me. You speak of physical exercise. I do a little daily. Today I played ball in the yard. I need, and will exercise more. But not to keep thin. By gosh, no! A strenuous life of work and rebellion has left but skin and bones since my arrest, and I am lucky enough to have saved them from the worms, during five years of exceptional good times. . . .

April 6, 1925.

*Bridgewater Hospital for Criminal Insane*

DEAR COMRADE BLACKWELL:

This week I have asked [permission to write] a special letter which was given me, and now, with this second letter, I am at last able to write to you.

As I told you, our Eugene Debs has also written me, and I answered him, but I am rather pessimist about the case, and am convinced that they will do all they can against us. Most probably, you already know that the case discussion has been postponed to next Fall. Yesterday, I had a visit from Mr. Thompson, and he explained to me the new delays causes: the judge's operation, Williams' promotion; a new district attorney, etc. I have not the least hope or trust in laws and law-traders; and you know what it is of which I trust and hope.

My hand writing progress was due to a comfortable table in the hospital at which I wrote while I was there.

Something is gradually dying in me, and what remains is just all right. I'm beginning to believe the Bible "The tyrants should be stabbed," and I am working out a philosophy proper to me and to many a millions of people; the philosophy of the new actual revolution in act: its moral sensation; for it was that which Victor Hugo used to call "the revolutions' god."

A comrade told me: "Alas to him who in the hours of revenge would raise his voice for pity and forgiveness. His same comrades would kill him, after what we have suffered from the fascisti. They did neither

beat or kill me, because the fascisti of my town were ashamed and afraid, and because I ran away from the others. But I have seen my wife hungry and my children crying for bread. I am more offended than if they killed me."

Enrico Malatesta is against useless or not necessary violence, and he may be right.

As for me, I have suffered these last few days a terrible heart-burn, and I have said, and maybe I may have, or I may not have ulcers in my stomach. If I have ulcers, it is alright, though I will fight against it. If I have no ulcers, it is still better.

*April 10, 1925.*

*Bridgewater Hospital for Criminal Insane*

DEAR FRIEND [MRS. MAUDE PETTYJOHN]:

Your letter of April 3rd with the enclosed scientific historical thesis received yesterday morning. They brought me joy and delight. . . . Scientific progress is one of the few encouraging things of these wretched times. Nevertheless, there is great confusion, contradiction and an always more rapid discovery of perceived former mistakes in this field than in the Labor Field, which is to say all. . . . Sometime ago Enrico Malatesta has written an golden page about what should be the mental attitude toward science, religion, the little knowledge of the enormous mystery encircling us and from which we sprang—of those who, as I, have Anarchistic principles and aims. And, if possible, I

will translate it to you, some day; then I will speak further on the topic.

I cannot share your confidence in "better government," because I do not believe in the government, any of them, since to me they can only differ in names from one another, and because we have witnessed the utterly failure of both the social-democrat governments in Germany, and the bolsheviki government in Russia. At least, such is my honest and sad opinion. But I wholly share of your confidence in Co-operatives, and, what is more, in real co-operatives, free initiative, both individual and collective. Mutual aid and co-operation and co-operatives shall be the very base of a completely new social system, or else, nothing is accomplished. . . . But when you tell me that the only consolation you give to your complaining friends against economical difficulties, is "that the times will be much harder," then I cannot help but clap my hands in great approval. So much so, that it is but the truth. And not only in economy, but in life's problems this will be true. We are galloping towards misery and wretchedness. Life grows miserable by each second, and he whom the gods have not yet wholly deprived of understanding, far from being surprised, should indeed wonder if it were not so, for, man is today his own greater enemy, and the slaves are, more than the powerful, the slave-keeper of themselves. Crucial truth for the libertarian, truth that drowns tears from our eyes, and curses from our heart, curses to those whom we would also deliver for their own sake. . . . Just this morning, I finished the lecture of *The Penguin*

*Island*, by Anatole France who masterly slaps, in this book, the pretensions, proudness, hypocrisy, stupidity and ferocity of the humane, and shows the uselessness of religions, and the venom of the clergies. The last chapter is entitled future time and is naturally drawn from the present conditions and state of mind and emotions. And it is said "after having destroyed the present curse called civilization, the people return to a certain primitiveness through which they gradually build and return to the present state." Thus the revolutionary Anatole did not superate any of the great writer of the past, for he reached the same conclusion which has 'til now been the truth. . . .

Even before I came here, I was the cause of much disturbed fear; distrust of keepers and doctors who have their jobs, love them, and believe me and my friends the worst and dangerous criminals. The higher of them, the more jack-asses.

So it follows that I was kept in solitary confinement for five weeks, after which I was allowed to the day-room, where it is forbidden to speak, and watched by eyes always. A few days after that I was admitted to the common table; knives and forks were taken from circulation, and we compelled to use the fingers as table-tools. Meanwhile, every good day, the other patients were compelled to go into the yard, and I had to stay in. It is five years that I have been deprived of all that makes life worth living. Sunlight and open-air is what is greatly needed after five years of shadows and miasmatic dwelling. So I kicked and I kicked: I want my rights, and I have the right

a daily hour in the open air. The State so splendidly framed us, cannot it give me any rights? Meanwhile, I began to perceive abuse and wrongs to the patients and, therefore, to protest and rebel. Were I alone, they would, for this, have me die within this wall. Well, after my protests, I was allowed to go into the yard; once a day, early in the morning, when none were there, and together with the biggest attendance. Thus, in three months, I went 7 times into the yard, and only the 7th I stayed there one hour, all the other, less. I used to clean the floors, help the patients take off the dust, watering plants, etc., so that the head assistant proclaimed me to the doctors "his better patient." And yet they kept watching, fearing and distrusting me to the point that the head assistant said that I should write in English my letters to my sister, to which I answered in rhymes.

Then they began to send me two times a day in the yard, where I began to play ball. Color was returning to my cheeks and fire to my eyes, and it happened that a strong Italian patient was brought here that time. So the keepers were trembling. Then, the ugly Monday of three weeks ago, while returning from the yard, I was arrested!!, compelled to undress myself, take a bath, change all the clothes, and to go to a worse ward of the institution, where the dangerous were. Here I can see but a fragment of sky, walls and a bare yard. I am allowed twice a day in the yard; one hour in the morning, 1½ hour in the afternoon; the rest of the time, in the room. I asked the director the reason for this change. He did not give me a single word of ex-

planation, but answered "Oh, we make the people go 'round." Indeed, he laughed so heartily at me. They also try to dispute and find difficulties with those who come to see me, so that to tire them. And I have only a letter a week, and I do not know when I will be able to send you this one, or a regular one. You will excuse me. Next time I will tell you more. Hoping this finds you and your family in good health and spirit, and I send to you, your family and our common friends, my regards and greetings.

*April 14, 1925.*

*Bridgewater Hospital for Criminal Insane*

DEAR COMRADE BLACKWELL:

I wrote the last letter in a fit of humor, and my actual regret cannot change it now from what it is. But I have improved and am improving from heartburn.

Naturally, in the age of frantic competition, as ours is, those who have a good job think themselves lucky, and thank their stars, for it means a good roof, table, bed, reputation, good living, for them and theirs, so that no matter how much of spirituality and christianism they feign to themselves and the other to possess, they look for themselves, which means: a world based on privileges, to abuse their neighbors. Many of us have a blind faith in science, and they believe in science, because it must be good.

For me, I have already experienced that in name of "Psychopathy" may be committed the same, if not more, cruelty, injustice and partiality, as in the name of the law. Psychology is still more subtle and indefinable than Law itself. And a doctor may be as mean as lawyer or a keeper even more, though, both may be good. We would not have advanced an inch toward justice, progress, liberty or happiness, by simply and only shifting from laws to medicine or psychology, because the real progress represented by the "curing" upon the "punishing" may become, by environment and men's vices, a bloody insult to misfortune and truth. To progress, even a little, we have to destroy a world. . . .

*April 16, 1925.*

*Bridgewater Hospital for Criminal Insane*

DEAR COMRADE BLACKWELL:

I bite my tongue 'til now, not to tell you a thing which will make you sorry, but I cannot help but tell it. They took me away from the hospital and brought me in the east north ward, the worst of the wards, for the most dangerous or the punished. While other patients enjoy all day long the sunshine and open air in spacious yards, we have one hour of yard in the morning, and one in the afternoon, and our yard is narrow and shadowy; closing the sight, except to the sky. The door of my room is kept open during the day, and I