

TO KILL REFUSING

BRISTOL'S WORLD WAR 1 CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS

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Title: Letter from Hope Squire 4/6

Description: A hand written letter

Details: Letter from Hope Squire (Frank Merrick's first wife) to Frank in prison, 10 April 1918.

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Credit: With permission of Frank Merrick's family - Celia Bloor, Phoebe Merrick and Paul Merrick

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Broadway, April 10th 1918.
My dear brave patient Frank. If you could know how many hundreds of times I've repeated those three precious words you said close to the wires - and how I wanted to write to you that very night - but I've hung out till today because I thought it would make the time seem better filled up for you if you did not get all your treats at once. I wrote, & Anne wrote to three different Societies about the points discussed with you & we hope & have some assurance already that there will be good developments. I don't think I have ever felt more contemptuous - forgive me - than I did about the Uncle George business - to think that Uncle G's snobbishness could be considered at the expense of your heroic unselfishness - it isn't even giving the poor little creature a fair chance to show a Christian spirit! However I've forgiven so much from the Clan since you went away that no doubt I can overlook this insult also. Anne was simply furious. We went to Pansy's flat, and had tea with her & Valda - a most fascinating little woman - about 24 - who shares the flat with her now. Valda is Russian French, her husband is Norwegian & is in the British Army. They are the Eastern Atmosphere & they need spring cleaning!!!!

(I feel I ^{must} waste that inch with exclamation marks to convey my meaning.)
I left Golden Green at 10 AM. Monday, and walked part of the way to Exton. The train was crowded with soldiers, and Japanese, Indians, Negroes, & two wounded German prisoners in the carriage next to mine. Although they could hardly drag themselves along they were escorted by 4 fixed bayonets. Pure red-tape but an example of Militarism which makes a great impression when seen! The people on the platform crowded round the carriage, some abusive epithets & much giggling and sneering - but not from any of the soldiers who were all quite considerate. In my carriage 4 soldiers & 3 ladies - all talked about the war while I learned Esperanto, presently abuse & ridicule of the C.O.'s. So after a few minutes I looked up & said quietly "I wish to tell you all that I am the wife of a Conscientious Objector." There was a horrified silence & then one lady "assumed the offensive" backed up by the S. African Soldier - a handsome version of Horace (in looks & ways) - the others except a Slav joined in, & your darling P.B. tackled the lot with great ability for 1/2 an hour. We then arrived at a station and the Slav slipped

out of the train & returned with a Cup of tea for me. The other men then
rushed out & got some tea for the other ladies, & themselves. I had previously
given a bottle of Coffee with milk & sugar to a young Soldier who was had
been travelling since early morning. The Arguments Continued - these
men had only come across members of the Non-Com: Corps, & when I
explained that a real C.O. would not be in the N.C.C. they were quite
at a loss - in an hour all were my very good friends & eventually all ex-
pressed real appreciation of the real C.O.s whom they knew nothing about,
& declared that they simply could not stand Solitary Confinement
even for a week. They were all very nice men, but had never thought
much & knew very little outside their own daily doings. The S. African
was the most brainy, frankly Capitalistic, & a strong tea taker, & heavy
Smoker, In favour of W. Suffrage, so long as they did not smoke, & continued
to dress nicely & work, hated idleness in man or woman. He spent a good part
of the forenoon in getting peoples luggage in front, & moving sacks & boxes in the
Corridor for people to go past very few minutes - but ridiculed all forms
of Socialism! The Slav (what he was doing in the British Army I could not
guess & did not ask -) had the most beautiful expression of face & manner,
putting you and Mr. Beauland aside, that I have met for years. He also
had very perfect teeth. A slow quiet, gentle speech. Could speak 5 or 6 languages,
& was amused & pleased to find that he could understand Esperanto
quite well at first sight. I was very interested in this man, for he seemed
so well educated & thoughtful, & musical, great Opera enthusiast, & had
that air of extra-ordinary self command & trust worthy ness that would
have made him a first-rate Martyr in any Cause. I think that he
probably is so innately devoid of self-esteem that if he would if he
had an opinion which conflicted with public opinion he would never
feel able to assert it ^{in case it was because it was only his opinion.} Per-
haps you can understand me, I'm explaining it badly; but he said so
many things that were in accordance with our thoughts, & yet he seemed
uncomplainingly resigned to accepting the opposites. He has not been out yet - is
going in 3 weeks time - I think he will get a terrible awakening. No parents, &
lives in Regent's Park - going up to spend his leave with a friend in Lapsight.
There was a very good baby in the train 16 months old, but looked older,

it never cried or fidgeted, but ate a bread & butter sandwich & drank out of a cup - unaided, & quite neatly. It & its Mother were staying with various friends their house having been destroyed by a bomb. By the way, I have since been told that when the German prisoners are operated on for any injury, they are escorted from the operating table to their beds, even when unconscious with facial bayonets. I spent yesterday tramping after manure & have run one to earth in Bowdon. #2 guineas for a Chappell up right 15 years old (or more.) Today the old gardener came & has lopped the trees, I fear you would dislike the look of them, but it will let much more light into the house, & sun into the garden, & they will soon sprout. The huge tree has not been touched - only the ones at the side. He sawed big branches off & I took little ones of them with "gullanties", a kind of glorious scissors that cut through ever such thick stems. I shall have to work hard to sort out & clear up the debris - there will be lots of logs, & sticks, & firewood. I saw such a lot of heart breaking horses in London, it is simply dreadful to go out there, much worse than here. Second rate horses now fetch £70 & £80, & when the good horses were being commandeered £40 was considered good compensation. I was pleased to see a notice lately saying that anyone who turns a dog adrift will be prosecuted. A while ago the dog question was very acute, so many starving outcasts. I took one to the Police Station in the pouring rain one Sunday morning, I couldn't possibly lift it, a big dog - I had to push it all the way - a yard or two pushing & then a bit of pulling & then another push. Just before the 8th a soldier came up & helped me to carry it up the steps. The police were kind to it & it was sent to the dog's home at night. Algden got my letter & today, I received his answer - such a noble letter - & so illiterate, he says he is so glad you are sticking to your principles, & sends his best regards. He does not know that P. Graham has told me he has been, & is, so thin & weak - he says he is very well etc. he says "them Sergeants what was here in charge of us when Frank and I was here are still here, and I may tell you I am being well treated, nothing to do all day but only enjoy myself & talk with the soldiers, and tell them why we are making our stand such chaps as Frank & I, and my word Mr Merrick they are surprised how we stick it and I tell

them that when we think and know as we are fighting for what is right,
they admire us for it" etc etc -----, "but dear friend they can give me 12
years this time for what difference it will make to me for I am ~~not~~ determin-
ed to see this thing through come what will. For Prison life comes as second
nature when you have been in a few months, etc etc - he signs him self
"W.H. Ogden C.O." I have sent him a big cake (to Bury) & our kind regards
to the two sergeants. M^r Rogers writes that she has written put your
Court Marshal address in her Olive Schreiner book etc. Edith Mary sends her love &
is "happy to ^{assure} ~~inform~~ you ^{that} the quality of that substance now in stock has
attained a higher degree of excellence, owing to existing war conditions!"
Thekla sends best love & a huge kiss etc. Mother & Lindy, very best love, Maud's love
& thanks for message. Crowds of them send similar. Nell said one day - "If
Mr Merrick were to come in at that door now - what ever should we all do - it
won't bear thinking about!" Ann & Co send best love. J. has just been addressing
a p.c. to "The Diablen Dance and Sundry Co" doesn't it sound like Dickens?
They are further explained as Mantles of Smees, Gray, Browning, & fire lighters.
The last named being what Thekla is ordering. By the way, I'm staying here a
few days, the pussies - Matthew, Hubal and the dirty faced one, are still at Mr
Brook's banks. I am trying to get some necessary clothes making done. Thekla
reads Ibsen in German tone, - & while she works some times I read Nicholas
Nickelby to her. In the begining there is a wonderful description of a political meeting
at which Sir Matthew Pumper is the chief attraction, it is quite up to the
"Civ. Serv. Office" level of excellence. Well, I hope you'll soon get the W.S. Gilberts.
I got them at last & have sent them; but they are wretched print, the only thing I could get.
Now my dearest I must end this very humdrum letter - each time I have
been to see you, I have been shocked afterwards at my own high spirits, & wondered
if you or the warden or Daddy or Horace think I'm too gay to have felt our separ-
-ation deeply, & too gay to be moved or upset by these meetings, for it is quite evi-
-dent that you are controlling a great deal of pent up feeling. My high spirits
are simply excitement & are preceded & followed by tremendous tension and
reaction, inwardly, for I don't trust myself to talk about you much at such times.
I expect you understand all this, you know me better than any one else does. I so often
think of Hugh Pope saying he liked me & pitied all other people. That's not far out in the
proportion of my love towards you & the rest of the world though I shouldn't use those words
xxx from your ever & ever loving, longing hope who desperately wants you all the time.