

(November 20th.)

Why Women Want to Vote, and How They Hope to Win it.

BY MRS. E. PANKHURST.

ADDRESSING the Canadian Club, on the subject: "Why Women Want to Vote, and How They Hope to Win It," Mrs. E. Pankhurst said:

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,—I cannot help feeling, very strongly, at this moment, that the "privileged position" which ladies used to occupy was, in some respects, an advantage. We were placed upon a pedestal, if you will. We were household nonentities, sometimes they called us ornaments. We were, at any rate, negligible units in the community. We must live, move and have our being within the sphere prescribed for us. We were never expected to have any reason for our acts. We were irresponsible, and—harmless.

To-day I feel a great sense of responsibility—the responsibility of being the chosen spokeswoman for women; of having the opportunity—and opportunity always implies responsibility—of presenting our case, of seeking to make quite clear some of the advantages to be derived from our coming down if you will from the pedestal to which we have been elevated.

As a business woman I am glad to meet business men. I am free to express to you my gratitude, for myself and for the women whom I represent, that you have given me the opportunity of putting the case before you. I earnestly realize the advantage which that opportunity gives me. I am a business woman and I therefore recognize that being here to address you on your invitation is a good business movement, both at home as well as here. As business men you will appreciate that.

Now as a business woman I shall be about my business. I shall seek, in the brief time at our disposal, to make you understand that, despite all you may have read, ours is a thoroughly businesslike practical movement. Our project is a serious one.

Mrs. Emiline Pankhurst is the founder and leader of Women's Social and Political Union, of England, and the recognized leader of the militant wing of the women's suffrage movement called the "Suffragettes."

Our decisions are arrived at only after careful and full reflection. We have gone about our project as practical business women and politicians. We have mapped our plan of campaign and are proceeding along lines carefully thought out and determined.

I am aware that most of you know us as a few irresponsible hysterical women making scenes without reason or purpose. There is a good deal of excuse for this misinterpretation and misjudgment. You have formed your judgment second-hand. You only know us from what has been said about us. You judge of us from the press. Well, the press has a way of its own. We don't control it. I wish we did. We need the press. But the press only reports what it thinks the public want, and what makes good "copy." It does not seem interested in a quiet, methodical, perhaps inert movement. It is looking for the sensation. It wants the startling, the unusual. We needed the press; we needed publicity. So we have given it what it is looking for. We did unusual things to direct attention to our project and our campaign. And, as was to be expected, only that part of our campaign which was unusual was reported by the press.

But, ladies and gentlemen, to understand the English movement you must see the plan as a whole. As business men you know that the working out of any great enterprise is a complicated and often cosmopolitan undertaking. The conduct of a large business enterprise is divided up into departments, each with a vital relation to the other. To judge the whole by one of the units which go to comprise it is an unwise, not to say an unjust, procedure. To estimate its real worth and its real force you must have the completed plan before you. You must look upon it as a whole.

There is not time to develop all the sides of our project now, for it is a big project, and has many sides. I must condense—for women can condense, and be just as practical as men—and if you take sufficient interest in the outline, perhaps you will attend the meeting to-night and hear the whole campaign more fully explained.

The whole thing was thought out on the eve of a general election, when the Liberals were returned to power after twenty long years in the wilderness of opposition. We set ourselves to seriously review and study the situation and the character of the party, and determine upon the best and most effectual methods of advancing our claims and securing our right in the matter of franchise.

Perhaps some one is inclined to raise a question at the outset. Why do women want the vote? Easily answered. For the same reason as men would want the vote under similar conditions. Many women are wage earners. Others are engaged in professional callings. The majority are doing their part in the home. Women bear their share of the burdens of the community. They want the vote as units who are contributing their part of the responsibilities and obligations of citizenship, who are bearing their share of the burdens of the state. Women want the vote as taxpayers. They want the vote as those who are helping to pay the salaries of the members of the Government. They want the vote as persons who have to obey the laws they have no share in making.

So, as I have said, they set to work to review the situation and determine how best to secure the right which they deemed was theirs, and which they had hitherto been denied. This, we determined, was the time—and the right time—to get the vote. We had been talking for fifty years. We had societies and organizations for thirty years. We had held meetings and signed petitions. A women's suffrage bill had passed its second reading. All this had been done, and yet we were no nearer getting what we wanted than when we started.

So we set about to consider the whole matter, and discover where our efforts had been unavailing. We asked ourselves: How did men get the vote? We set about studying history. And we found that persons outside the constitution never won constitutional rights by constitutional means. We began to study and to analyse the history of our own country. We learned therefrom that, preceding the adoption of every reform act, after all ordinary methods and procedure had failed, the reformers had recourse to measures of a more or less violent character.

Men had been successful, and we determined to imitate the men. We sought to adopt male methods to female requirements. The newspapers had taken no notice of our movement. It was humdrum and ineffective. It did not provide "good copy." We determined to break down the press boycott and gain the ear of the politician and the public. A number of the politicians declared themselves in favor of the movement. But they stopped short with sympathy. They made speeches—gallant men!—and told their audiences how much better women were than men—you know the kind of speeches. For years this performance had gone on. Then a bill came in, as usual, and afforded another "night off" for

its discussion in the House of Commons, before it was laid to rest. Occasionally the matter was mentioned on the public platforms, but never as a serious part of the business under discussion. When the politicians wanted the women to canvass for them, they were much with us. They made fine promises. They told us we could be of real service to politics. And then, when the campaign was over, the same men began to talk very learnedly of the high and sacred calling and position of womanhood, and opined that it should never be degraded by bringing women into the realm of practical politics.

We knew all this. We had experienced it often. We recognized that so long as it continued our efforts would only be met with amused tolerance. We could accomplish nothing. So we consulted history, and decided that we must alter our plan of campaign.

My friends, whether you like our methods or not, you must recognize that we have achieved results along the lines we aimed at. In three years we have brought our movement into the very forefront of practical politics. We have broken down the press boycott. It is true that we are not reported in the newspapers as we would like to be reported. But we would rather be reported anyway than not reported at all. We are anxious to have the attention of people drawn to our movement by any means. Even misrepresentation helps. We could have hoped for fairer and more earnest treatment, but we have not minded what we have got. It has been an excellent free advertisement for our cause.

The politicians in the cabinet don't like us, but they don't laugh at us. The House of Commons regards us very seriously indeed. We would sooner have their indignation, than their indulgent discussion, cheap sneers and jests in their smoking room. The indifference stage has gone by. They realize that we mean business, and have got a strong case. Our campaign has taken its position where we wanted it, in the forefront of the realm of practical politics.

Women being women need the vote more than certain classes of men. Their outlook differs from man's point of view. Sometimes I think they have a better conception of the true meaning of politics. Politics have changed, you know. Politics used to be the science of fighting other people. The highest kind of politics to-day is recognized to be the kind that builds up, the constructive politics, the politics that does not stop short of the homes of the people, and the making of

a great nation by assuming its responsibility for the birth, upbringing and training of the children.

But I am told it is the duty of the men to shield and protect women. I know many are ready to do their part. But since man, after all, is mortal and human, he is not always able to carry out his obligation. There are many—very many—who are glad to have their daughters go out, like their brothers, to do their share, and do it well, toward the upkeep and prosperity of the home.

Men are fond of talking of us as the weaker sex. Sometimes I wonder just what they mean. But if they mean what they say, then why handicap the weak? Why put the disadvantage on the weak in the great games of life? Why not handicap the strong? Why should the woman or the child who have lost the bread-winner of the home be put under a greater handicap? Wouldn't you feel more happy to know that the widow had an equal chance with men? If the daughters must go out into the world and fight their own battle, why not give them equal chance with their brothers to equip themselves for the campaign and hold their own?

It is true you will occasionally come upon the woman parasite, the woman who is content to live upon others and make no effort to contribute her share, whatever that may be, to the weal of the community. But these, I submit, are very few, and are nearly always confined to the wives and daughters of very rich men. But even these are not secure. The world has sometimes witnessed the terrible and pathetic spectacle of seeing these, utterly unequipped as they are, thrown out upon its arms to sink or swim amid its tumult.

So we ask for an equal chance. We have set ourselves about securing it. You may not like the way we have done it in England. You may not like our methods. Well, we haven't liked them ourselves. Some of them were pretty serious. But we had to adopt such methods as were at our disposal. Women were left without weapons, and had to evolve such means of battle as were at their command. The politicians were too busy to realize woman's side of it. You go to the average political meeting, and you hear the speakers discuss the needs, and the wishes, and the interests of the voters. They never speak of women, or, if they do, they allude to them as dependents.

Will you permit me to touch on the personal for a moment? I was left a widow before my children were grown up. My husband, when living, had been a politician of advanced opinions. He was engaged in the most conservative profes-

sion in the world, that of law. But he had high ideals. If he thought a thing to be right he was prepared to stand for it, even if it cost briefs. I agreed with him and we followed our course. We determined to give our children the best education they could obtain, and to educate them along the advanced lines which we had both accepted. But it happened that he did not live long enough to be able to give them their start. He had, however, encouraged me to share his zeal and his interest in public life. I was enabled to hold a respectable official position. And here the second element in existing conditions forced its notice upon me. Here I was, a public representative and now a public official, doing my public work faithfully and satisfactorily, and yet I was not considered fit to put a cross upon the ballot.

The anomaly of the thing filled me with protest. My boy had reached the age of twenty-one and had been accorded the right to vote, while I was still without any such right. To use a homely English expression, it wasn't good enough for me. The boy agreed with me, so we decided to take some action. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had witnessed the emancipation of men. The twentieth century was the century of the children. Only the women had been left out. So we decided to take action.

We saw Mr. Asquith, but we got little satisfaction. "You will get the vote," he told us, "when every woman wants it." "And how were we to know that," we asked. "You must find out for yourselves," was his response. "You must work out your own salvation."

We took him at his word. We set about working out our own salvation. And to do so effectively we studied history. We sought to learn how our brothers, the men, had secured reforms and rights. We determined to follow in their footsteps. And history told us a terrible story. It told us of the terrible methods by which the men had won their rights. It told us how they had taken human life and destroyed public buildings. But we did not want to take human life. Ah, sirs, we knew the cost of it. Sometimes we give our own to bring it in. So we decided to conduct our campaign in such a manner that nobody should be hurt, nobody except the women themselves.

And we made ourselves ridiculous, they tell us. Well, if you can win what you want by being ridiculous, why not be ridiculous? You've always laughed at us, anyway. We have always been flattered and jested at and with. We're used to being considered ridiculous, and we don't mind it. But it's

very different with the men. Cabinet ministers don't want to be made to appear ridiculous. They cannot bear it half as well as we can. They abhor ridicule, these veiled prophets of Khorassan, from whom we have torn the veil. It is they who are being made ridiculous. Think of the Prime Minister sneaking out of the entrance of a building with a cloth over his head, afraid to meet a few women. See him in Birmingham, being shot down the parcel tube of the post office to escape the possibility of encountering a woman. Isn't that the ridiculous part of it? If you can laugh yourself into the vote, why kill to do it?

So we have gone on, step by step, checkmating their every move, till we are getting the Government into a tight corner, when they begin to think that the easiest way out is to give us the vote we seek. Laughing ourselves into a vote, did I say? Ay, but behind the laughter there is tragedy. Women's lives are hanging in the balance. This is a very serious fight. Women are quite prepared, if necessary, to yield their lives for their conviction. They would do it cheerfully, knowing that it would contribute greatly to the ultimate victory. Yes, the suffragette may smile, but behind that smile is a fixed determination that if the sacrifice of her life is demanded for the cause, she is cheerfully willing to make it. Take the hunger strike, the starvation method—that is a terrible weapon on us, but it is, too, terribly effective. Officialdom knows that if one life slips through its fingers to the Great Beyond, the slow-going British voter will bestir himself and make it very uncomfortable for those in control. Behind the stomach pumps is that which is making the Government very uncomfortable and very anxious.

We have forced our project to the forefront. We have compelled the attention of Cabinet Ministers. They are now giving us consideration. And all this could have been done with less sacrifice of false pride. We recognize that we are putting ourselves against the greatest government of modern times. But we are of good courage, and will wage the battle to the bitter end. I have said but little, but I would that you should realize that this civil war of ours—for it is a civil war—has a serious purpose, and that people should know what we are about, and understand how much it means, not only to us but to the country as a whole. We are fighting in the most civilized country on earth, a country we are proud of in many ways, a country that should take the lead in all matters of reform. We are working for the emancipation of half the human race. We have big ideals. We seek to raise the status

of womanhood, and thus raise humanity as a whole. We seek to secure intelligent citizens in the homes for the training and upbringing of the children.

It has been said that there never was a great man who was not the son of an exceptionally intelligent mother. So you see, after all, that the men will gain more than we shall in the long run. It was always thus—probably always will be. The sons are first with the mothers, just because the sons are men. The daughters may be clever, but the softest spot in the mother's heart is for her boy. I know whereof I speak. Even now I am hastening to return to the boy who is lying ill yonder beyond the ocean.

I have concluded, as I began, with the personal touch. But we are out in the fight in this great movement, and we cannot reveal much of the softer side. We must turn to the battle with its stress and seriousness, for it is only by fighting that the cause is ever won.