

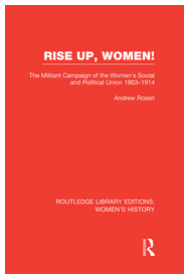
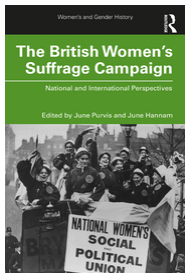
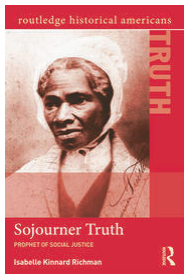
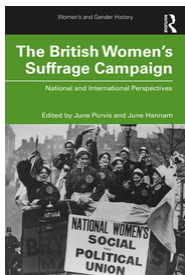
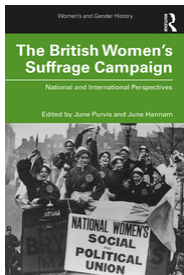
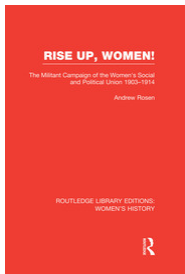
Notable Suffragettes

The Women who Fought for the Suffrage Movement



Taylor & Francis Group
an informa business

Contents



1. **Introduction**
Andrew Rosen
Rise Up, Women!
2. **Millicent Fawcett (1847–1929)**
Elizabeth Crawford
The British Women's Suffrage Campaign
3. **Emmeline Pankhurst (1858–1928)**
June Purvis
The British Women's Suffrage Campaign
4. **Sojourner Truth, Character, and Context**
Isabelle Kinnard Richman
Sojourner Truth
5. **Isabella Ford (1855–1924) and women's suffrage**
June Hannam
The British Women's Suffrage Campaign
6. **Epilogue: The Vote, and After**
Andrew Rosen
Rise Up, Women!

Introduction

In British history there are relatively few topics of broad interest which have not, at some time, been written upon. The militant campaign of the Women's Social and Political Union is certainly no exception; women's fight for the vote has been described in numerous autobiographies, in secondary accounts of a popular nature, and in general works on the history of the women's suffrage movement as a whole. The most important of the autobiographies written by those who were active in the WSPU have been Annie Kenney's *Memories of a Militant* (1924), E. Sylvia Pankhurst's *The Suffragette Movement* (1931), Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence's *My Part in a Changing World* (1938), Frederick William Pethick-Lawrence's *Fate Has Been Kind* (1943), and Dame Christabel Pankhurst's *Unshackled* (1959).^{*} Without doubt, the most widely-read secondary account of the suffragettes has been that contained in George Dangerfield's *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (1936).[†] A more recent but less penetrating account is Antonia Raeburn's *The Militant Suffragettes* (1973).[‡] Finally, the standard works on the women's suffrage movement as a whole – that is, general works describing the movement from its inception in 1867 to either 1914 or to the winning of the vote in 1918 – have been Ray Strachey's *The Cause* (1926), Roger Fulford's *Votes for Women* (1957), and, more recently, Dr Constance Rover's *Women's Suffrage and Party Politics in Britain, 1866–1914* (1967).[§]

^{*} For comments on *The Suffragette Movement*, see fn. ^{*}, pp. 15–16.

[†] For comments on *The Strange Death of Liberal England*, see p. 213 and fn. ^{*}, p. 237.

[‡] Largely an anecdotal account of the personal experiences of individual suffragettes. The author does not attempt to capture the complexity of the WSPU, her approach to which is both simplistic and uncritical.

[§] *The Cause* and *Votes for Women* are both surveys primarily based on secondary sources. The brief biographies contained in the appendix of *Votes for Women* are, however, invaluable. *Women's Suffrage and*

Curiously enough, despite the number of books devoted entirely or in part to the history of the fight for women's enfranchisement, no full length scholarly monograph based on extensive research into archival source material has yet been devoted to the Women's Social and Political Union. The explanation for this somewhat curious lack is not hard to come by; as recently as 1966, when I first became seriously interested in the WSPU, militant feminism was still regarded by most professional historians as something of an historical curiosity – interesting enough in its own right, but certainly a most minor tributary to the main streams of social history, if, indeed, a tributary at all. As a result of this attitude, professional historians had paid no more than passing attention to women's suffrage movements, with the consequence that, as none of the existing works touching on the suffragettes had been grounded in extensive archival research, many of the most important sources for the history of the WSPU had never been used. To give but a few examples, neither the journals of H. W. Nevinson, nor the secret correspondence between Christabel Pankhurst and A. J. Balfour, nor the Arncliffe-Sennett Collection, nor the papers of Teresa Billington-Greig, nor the reports of the Metropolitan Police, nor the Sylvia Pankhurst Papers deposited at the Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam, had been made use of by anyone writing on the WSPU. Moreover, a number of published but obscure sources, such as Emily Wilding Davison's essay, 'The Price of Liberty' (see p. 199), were completely unknown, the annual reports of the WSPU had not been mined, and the myriad ephemeral articles, speeches, and statements to the press which had emanated from the leaders of the WSPU remained buried in a host of forgotten newspaper columns. Finally, the papers of those politicians most affected by the militant campaign – Asquith, Lloyd George, Herbert Gladstone, and their colleagues – had not been consulted with regard to the

Party Politics in Britain, 1866–1914, is the most recent and the most scholarly general treatment of the various women's suffrage organizations and the vexed political situation they encountered. Dr Rover is insufficiently empathetic with the Liberals' very real political dilemmas, but hers is the only published work to date which has attempted to dissect political parties' attitudes towards the women's suffrage question. For additional comment, see fn. *, p. 9.

light they might shed on the Liberal Government's reaction to the suffragettes.

In making use of these and other sources, I have been particularly interested in the origins and underlying patterns of militancy, the political efficacy (or inefficacy) of the WSPU's tactics, and the effect of those tactics on the ideology and organizational structure of the WSPU. I have also been concerned with the Union's almost intimate relationship with those politicians who, by blocking the passage of women's suffrage legislation for so many years, were directly responsible for bringing about the exasperation of the suffragettes at the apparently complete inefficacy of conventional methods of agitation. Finally, I have attempted to assess the character of the final and most extreme phase of militancy – the arson campaign of 1913–14 – and I have been struck by the extent to which the WSPU in its two final years came to resemble, in certain respects, millenarian movements of other eras.

In writing this history I have striven to construct an account which is faithful not only to the facts as I found them, but faithful in affect as well – I have tried to write history which is evocative as well as accurate. In connection with this effort, a few questions of usage arose in which decisions that were to some extent arbitrary seemed called for.

With regard to the use and non-use of the prefixes Miss and Mrs, I decided to follow the usages generally prevalent within the WSPU: for example, Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst and Mrs Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence were known to all but a few intimate friends as Mrs Pankhurst and Mrs Pethick-Lawrence, and they have been referred to thus in these pages, whereas Christabel Pankhurst and Sylvia Pankhurst were usually referred to as Christabel and Sylvia – there were, after all, three Misses Pankhurst in the WSPU – and I have frequently referred to them by their first names. Neither disrespect nor undue familiarity will, it is hoped, be construed from this practice. To have referred consistently to Christabel Pankhurst by her full name would, I think, have established a degree of formality not present in the WSPU, and would have failed to convey a sense of that intimacy through which, as Christabel, she became idolized by her followers.

A question of usage also arose with regard to direct quotations from newspaper accounts of speeches: Edwardian and Georgian newspapers, in reporting speeches and interviews, frequently changed first person pronouns to third person pronouns – ‘I’ and ‘we’ became ‘she’, ‘he’, and ‘they’, and corresponding changes in syntax were made. For example, on 4 July 1896 the *Manchester Guardian* quoted Mrs Pankhurst as saying, ‘she was aware when she spoke that very likely proceedings would be instituted against her.’ Despite the lack of complete fidelity to all the original words, such newspaper reports often constitute the most accurate available accounts of important statements, and I have on occasion quoted such reports rather than resorting to paraphrase. I have, on the other hand, completely avoided the use of any of the highly suspect dialogue introduced into so many personal memoirs by WSPU members – such memoirs were usually written twenty to forty years after the words quoted were allegedly spoken, and I have found that over such lengthy periods the unaided human memory is an unreliable recorder of events, let alone of what people actually said.

Matters of usage aside, some definition of topic may be helpful: my subtitle – ‘The Militant Campaign of the Women’s Social and Political Union, 1903–1914’ – is intended to describe accurately the subject of this book. I have not attempted to chronicle the doings of the non-militant National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies, nor have I attempted to analyse with any completeness the history of women’s suffrage legislation, though I have discussed in some detail the necessarily close relationship between political leaders, parliamentary affairs, and the tactics of the WSPU, and I have also analysed in detail the factors which led to the passage of women’s suffrage legislation in 1916–18.

In conclusion, I would add that in my subtitle and elsewhere I have used the word ‘militant’ as it was used by the women of the WSPU: by militant I do not necessarily mean illegal or violent – though most of the activities called militant were illegal, and many were violent – rather, I refer to a wide spectrum of tactics chosen by the WSPU precisely because its leaders knew that conventional society would regard those tactics as acts of social and political bellicosity when employed by women. Broadly defined, militant tactics were those tactics sufficiently

combative as to be widely regarded as shocking, and therefore worthy of comment – comment being exactly what the WSPU sought; the militant campaign was based on the perception that the use of ‘shocking’ tactics, by evoking discussion, would create substantial public interest in a cause which had previously seemed virtually moribund.

2

EMMELINE PANKHURST (1858–1928)

The making of a militant

June Purvis

In 1999, *Time* magazine named Emmeline Pankhurst as one of the hundred most important people of the 20th century.¹ Such praise for ‘Mrs. Pankhurst’, as she is commonly known, is not unusual. In a *BBC History Magazine* poll undertaken in 2018 she was ranked amongst the top three of the 100 most influential women in the world.² It is for her leadership of the ‘militant’ Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU), the most notorious of the various groupings campaigning for the parliamentary vote for women in Edwardian Britain, that Emmeline Pankhurst is so well known.

The *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* defines ‘militant’ as being engaged in warfare, warring, combative. Certainly, Christabel Pankhurst, Emmeline’s eldest daughter, her co-leader of the WSPU, its Chief Organiser and key strategist, saw militancy as an act whereby women were assertive, throwing off the ‘slave spirit’ that held them in subjection to an all-male government in patriarchal Edwardian Britain.³ Militancy therefore meant engaging in forms of behavior that challenged conventional expectations about women being submissive and accepting of their inferior status.⁴ However, most historians equate militancy with the more violent, illegal tactics that some WSPU members engaged in during the period 1912–1914.⁵ This is highly problematic. I shall elucidate in this chapter how militancy embraced a broad range of tactics, both legal and illegal, and how Emmeline Pankhurst supported such activities. In doing so I shall offer an account of her life, highlighting what I see as some of the key influences making her a militant leader.

It is commonly claimed that Emmeline Goulden was born in Manchester on 14 July 1858, but her birth certificate records the following day. Perhaps the registrar made a mistake, or perhaps Emmeline herself invented the date. After all, as a young woman she developed a passion for all things French and the 14 July was a revered date in French history, the day in 1789 when revolutionaries had

stormed the Bastille, a state prison in Paris, hoping to overthrow a repressive regime and establish a new age of liberty, equality and fraternity. The appeal for Emmeline of this story of an oppressed people fighting for justice was often referred to in her suffrage campaigning years as she fought for justice for women from an intransigent government. Certainly Emmeline *believed* that she was born on the 14th July. In December 1908, when she was presented with the replica of a medal struck to commemorate the winning of the Bastille, she said that the fact that she was born on that day 'has been some kind of influence over my life ... it was women who gave the signal to spur on the crowd, and led to the final taking of that monument of tyranny'.⁶

Emmeline, the eldest girl in a family of ten surviving children, was born to comfortably off middle-class parents, her father Robert Goulden being a partner and manager of a cotton printing and bleach works and her mother, Sophia Jane, a housewife. A lively and precocious child, she could read by the incredibly early age of three. When a little older, Emmeline was given the task of reading the daily newspapers to her father an activity that helped to develop 'a genuine interest in politics'.⁷ Her young mind was early disposed to 'rebellion and reform' by stories of how her paternal grandfather had narrowly escaped death at the Peterloo franchise demonstration in Manchester in 1819 when a peaceful crowd of 80,000 men, women and children were attacked by armed cavalry, resulting in 15 deaths and over 600 injuries. In the 1840s, her parental grandmother was an active protester, with her husband, against the Corn Laws which imposed duties on imported foodstuffs, and often related to her impressionable granddaughter tales of those times.⁸

The rich industrial city of Manchester was at the forefront of dissenting politics and Emmeline's parents were advocates of equal suffrage for men and women, as well as ardent supporters of the abolitionists in the American Civil War. Sophia, born in 1833 in the Isle of Man, had enjoyed the exercise of the franchise there since the Isle of Man was independent from Britain and had granted Manx single and propertied women the parliamentary vote in 1881.⁹ The *Women's Suffrage Journal*, edited by Lydia Becker, secretary of the influential Manchester National Society for Women's Suffrage, regularly came to the Goulden household, and Sophia often spoke to her children about women's suffrage and about the evils of slavery. Emmeline vividly remembered the time she went to a large bazaar, held to raise money to relieve the poverty of the emancipated black slaves. Entrusted with a lucky bag, she collected pennies from sympathetic supporters. 'Young as I was – I could not have been older than five years – I knew perfectly well the meaning of the words slavery and emancipation'.¹⁰

Such experiences, Emmeline believed, had a profound influence on her character, awakening in her an admiration for 'that spirit of fighting and heroic sacrifice by which the soul of civilization is saved'. She loved to read stories that emphasized such ideals, particularly John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* and Thomas Carlyle's *The French Revolution*, the latter remaining all her life, 'a source of inspiration'.¹¹ As Sandra Holton observes, Carlyle's view of history as an

unpredictable process where individuals were confronted with the choice of fighting for a better world or allowing society to degenerate into chaos is of the greatest importance for understanding Emmeline's future role in the women's suffrage campaign and how progressive change is brought about.¹²

When she was 14 years old, the future leader of the WSPU accompanied her mother one day to a talk to be given by Lydia Becker. The enthralled Emmeline left the meeting 'a conscious and confirmed' supporter of the women's cause. 'I suppose I had always been an unconscious suffragist. With my temperament and my surroundings I could scarcely have been otherwise'.¹³ Soon sent to school in Paris, she returned home in the summer of 1879 an elegant young woman, with a magnificent posture. Yet, despite her sophistication, Emmeline was still expected to take her place as the eldest daughter in a large family, doing various 'feminine' tedious tasks, such as dusting the drawing room.¹⁴

Eager to be doing something useful in the world, Emmeline went with her parents to a political meeting where Dr. Richard Pankhurst, a radical barrister who supported unpopular causes such as education for the working classes and women's rights, was speaking. Richard Pankhurst, now 44 years old, had resolved to stay single all his life, in order to devote himself to public life. But he noticed the strikingly beautiful young woman and decided to woo her. A member of the far left of the Liberal Party, the besotted Richard was soon writing to his intended, 'Dearest Treasure ... Every struggling cause shall be ours ...'¹⁵ Emmeline and Richard married on 18 December 1879 and soon had five children – Christabel born in 1880, Estelle Sylvia in 1882, Henry Francis Robert ('Frank') in 1884, Adela Constantia Mary in 1885, and a second boy, Henry Francis ('Harry') in 1889. Frank died in childhood.

Emmeline was determined to be a worthy partner in Richard's desire for reform, hoping that he would become a Member of Parliament, doing great things for the working masses and for women's rights. By March 1880 she was a member of the Executive Committee of the Manchester National Society for Women's Suffrage which included not only Richard but also Lydia Becker.¹⁶ This Society adopted constitutional, legal tactics of campaigning, such as writing letters to MPs and presenting an annual petition to parliament. Emmeline also became part of the network around the Manchester Married Women's Property Committee.¹⁷ As she later explained, 'I was never so absorbed with home and children ... that I lost interest in community affairs. Dr. Pankhurst did not desire that I should turn myself into a household machine. It was his firm belief that society as well as the family stand in need of women's services'.¹⁸

Richard's legal and political work was increasingly taking him to London where Emmeline longed to live since she believed that the metropolis, the centre of the English political system, would offer him a better chance of becoming an MP. By the late 1880s the family were living there. Their rented house at 8 Russell Square soon became a centre for political gatherings of a wide range of social reformers – socialists, Fabians, anarchists, suffragists, free thinkers and agnostics. A stream of radical politics ran through the household so that the four

surviving children – Christabel, Sylvia, Adela and Harry – rarely played games but ‘bobbed like corks on the tide of adult life’.¹⁹ In 1889 Emmeline and Richard became closely associated with the foundation of the Women’s Franchise League which, unlike the Manchester National Society for Women’s Suffrage, put forward an advanced programme for all women – single, married or widowed – that aimed to campaign not just for the parliamentary vote but also for equal justice, including equal divorce and inheritance rights.²⁰ Such a broad programme of social reform was dear to Emmeline’s heart and frequently discussed at League gatherings held at her home.

Emmeline who had once been a member of the Women’s Liberal Federation now found her reforming spirit drawn into the developing socialist movement which she believed would right ‘every political and social wrong’.²¹ Both she and Richard joined the Fabians, and then the Independent Labour Party (ILP). By now the family had moved back to Manchester and in 1894 she became an ILP Poor Law Guardian in a poor area of that city. Here her direct contact with the harsh conditions of the poor stiffened her reforming resolve. In the Chorlton Workhouse she found little girls aged seven and eight years, clad in all seasons in thin cotton frocks, shivering as they scrubbed stone floors. Pregnant women, most of them unmarried and very young, did the hardest of work almost until their babies were born. After their confinement, they were allowed to stay in the hospital for two weeks and then faced a choice: to stay in the workhouse earning their living which meant being separated from their baby, or leave with the baby in their arms, ‘without hope, without home, without money, without anywhere to go’.²² Always a practical woman, the compassionate Emmeline formed alliances with other Guardians to bring about improvements in the lives of the inmates, despite strong opposition from some diehards. This contact with the degraded workhouse girls and women were ‘potent factors in my education as a militant’, Emmeline asserted. ‘I thought I had been a suffragist before I became a Poor Law Guardian, but now I began to think about the vote in women’s hands not only as a right but as a desperate necessity’.²³ This conclusion would undoubtedly have been influenced by the knowledge that women’s suffrage bills had been debated in parliament every year from 1870 to 1879, with the exception of 1874, with no successful outcome.²⁴ All these bills had been introduced not by the government of the day but as Private Members’ Bills, a process whereby an individual MP presents a bill to parliament.

It was through the rough and tumble of the ILP that Emmeline developed her campaigning and speaking skills, especially in 1898 when she joined the protest against the prohibition placed on the ILP holding meetings at Boggart Hole Clough, an uncultivated space of some 63 acres acquired by Manchester City Corporation. Wearing a pink straw bonnet, the defiant Emmeline sometimes spoke to crowds of about 50,000.²⁵ She was strongly supported in this endeavour by Richard who acted as defence lawyer for the agitators and was elected to the National Administrative Council of the ILP in 1896. But such political leanings did not endear Richard to those who could afford to pay for this legal services. In addition to financial worries, Richard’s health now became a matter of concern.

When Richard died on 5 July 1898, from a perforated stomach ulcer, Emmeline was heartbroken. With Richard no longer by her side, the sad Emmeline temporarily lost her interest in social reform and, with four dependent children to support, became preoccupied with the straightened financial circumstances in which she found herself. With her 'strong, self-reliant nature', she was determined to pay off the debts which her idealistic husband had been struggling for many years to liquidate.²⁶ Emmeline resigned from her unpaid work as a Poor Law Guardian and with her sister Mary, set up a shop selling silks, cushions and artistic wares. The two women had barely embarked on the venture when the Chorlton Board of Guardians offered Emmeline the salaried government post of Registrar of Births and Deaths. She gratefully accepted the offer, pleased to know that it also included a pension. A humbler home had to be found and so 62 Nelson Street, off Oxford Road in Manchester, was rented.²⁷ But Emmeline's experience as a Registrar in a poor working-class district only deepened her feminist and reforming convictions. 'I have had little girls of thirteen come to my office to register the births of their babies, illegitimate, of course. In many of these cases I found that the child's own father or some near male relative was responsible for her state'. There was nothing that could be done in most cases, since the age of consent was 16 years, 'but a man can always claim that he thought the girl was over sixteen'.²⁸

Emmeline had always kept alive a spark of her interest in political activities through her ILP membership and her gradual return to political life began in 1899, with the outbreak of the Boer War which she strongly opposed. The following year, when she was elected as an ILP candidate to the Manchester School Board, she discovered that female school teachers were paid less than their male counterparts and that at Manchester Technical College there was hardly any provision for women, even in bakery and confectionery classes, since men's trade unions 'objected' to women being educated for such skilled work. 'It was rapidly becoming clear to my mind that men regarded women as a servant class in the community', Emmeline reflected, 'and that women were going to remain in the servant class until they lifted themselves out of it'.²⁹

Matters came to a head on 2 October 1903 when Emmeline was astonished to hear that the branch of the ILP that used Pankhurst Hall, built in memory of her beloved Richard, would not allow women to join. Declaring that she had wasted her time in the ILP, the indignant widow agreed with Christabel's reproaches that she had allowed the women's cause to become effaced and that the time had come to form an independent women's organisation that ran parallel to the ILP but was not formally affiliated to it.³⁰ The small group who joined Emmeline and Christabel at 62 Nelson Street on 10 October 1903, mostly wives of ILP men, agreed with Emmeline on the name she had chosen, the 'Women's Social and Political Union'. Its aim was to campaign for votes for women on the same terms that it was granted to men. 'We resolved', recollected Emmeline, 'to limit our membership exclusively to women, to keep ourselves absolutely free from any party affiliation, and to be satisfied with nothing but action on our question.

Deeds, not words, was to be our permanent motto'.³¹ Now that she had re-entered the suffrage struggle, it became for her the key focus of her life. Her single-mindedness about votes for women, fuelled by her passion to end the unjust and oppressed conditions of her sex, was to be severely tested in the years to come.

During the early years of the WSPU Emmeline and Christabel were still members of the North of England Society for Women's Suffrage and adopted its constitutional means of protest. But it was all to no effect. When a general election was called for the autumn of 1905, an election in which it was expected that the Liberals would be returned to power, Christabel decided that it was time to act. She believed that only more assertive, conformational, less ladylike tactics would bring the women's cause to the notice of politicians and that it was critical to press for a government measure on women's suffrage, not rely on Private Members' Bills. Thus on 13 October 1905, Christabel and Annie Kenney, a recent working-class recruit to the WSPU, attended a Liberal Party meeting at the Free Trade Hall in Manchester and heckled a leading Liberal politician with the question, 'Will the Liberal Government, if returned, give votes to women?' In the disturbance that ensued, both young women were roughly ejected from the hall and arrested. Charged with disorderly conduct, both chose, as Christabel had pre-planned, short prison sentences rather than pay a fine.³² The anxious Emmeline had offered to pay the fines but Christabel was resolute that she should not. Emmeline did not disagree. Believing that her first-born and favourite child had the finest political instinct she 'identified herself' with the new tactics 'promptly and unreservedly', claimed Evelyn Sharp, evidence not only of her 'perception' but also of her 'perfect understanding' with Christabel.³³ The militant action of Christabel and Annie on the 13 October had the desired effect: it not only attracted the attention of the press and politicians, but it also bought many more women into what was soon to be called the 'suffragette' movement. From now on, heckling of male politicians at public meetings became a key WSPU tactic, as well as a willingness to go to prison.

Emmeline at this time was still a member of the ILP but tensions with that organisation were developing. As the feminist leader of the women-only WSPU she put women first and insisted that the ILP, which claimed to uphold sex equality, give precedence to women's suffrage. The ILP at its January 1907 conference refused to do so and supported adult suffrage instead. Some of the socialist members of the WSPU became increasingly unhappy with her stance and also with the WSPU's undemocratic structure. They planned a coup against her to take place at the WSPU's own conference to be held on 12 October. Getting wind of the plot, Emmeline re-asserted her authority and called a meeting two days beforehand at which she declared the constitution of the WSPU abolished, the annual conference cancelled and the election of a new committee by those present. When she called for those present to follow her, the majority did. The dissidents left the WSPU and formed a rival organisation, later called the Women's Freedom League. In the autumn of 1907, both Emmeline and Christabel resigned their membership of the ILP.

Emmeline offered no apology for the autocratic structure of the WSPU since she believed it was the most effective way to win votes for women. 'The W.S.P.U. is simply a suffrage army in the field', she contended. 'It is purely a volunteer army, and no one is obliged to remain in it'.³⁴ Teresa Billington-Greig, one of the dissidents, announced that Emmeline had declared herself a 'dictator' who 'elected herself and a few personal friends as an autocratic committee answerable to no one'.³⁵ But Emmeline's autocratic rule was in theory only since during the years immediately following the 1907 split she did not exercise any direct control over the WSPU. Although she was consulted on major policy matters, she had absolute confidence in Christabel who now lived with the Treasurer of the WSPU, Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence and her husband Fred, these three exercising daily executive control.³⁶

The charismatic Emmeline was constantly travelling around the country, speaking in endless meetings, leading the by-election campaign. Earlier that year, in March 1907, she had resigned her post as Registrar of Births and Deaths and given up her Manchester residence. Like a 'nomadic evangelist', she had no settled home but travelled with her belongings packed in a few suitcases, staying in hotels, rented flats or the homes of friends and supporters.³⁷ Although applauded on a public stage, her private life was often lonely.

Descriptions of Emmeline Pankhurst at this time capture some of her magic. A small, slender woman who wore delicate kid shoes of size three and a half, she would stand on a platform looking poised, dignified and elegant in a dress of dark purple or black. She had a tremendous presence, an air of authority. She captivated her audiences not just by her words but also by her apparent contradictions. Her radical speeches, urging women to rise up, contrasted with her appearance as a law-abiding widow and mother. Her fragile appearance belied a forcefulness, a driving energy, not usually associated with one described as 'so feminine'.³⁸

Emmeline's power of oratory was well known. She was 'vibrant', claimed Rebecca West. 'One felt, as she lifted up her hoarse, sweet voice ... that she was trembling. Only the reed was of steel, and it was tremendous'.³⁹ Emmeline spoke from the heart, without notes and with few gestures, drawing on her experience of life as she used clear arguments to convert her listeners to the women's cause. But it is mainly in connection with her defiance of the law and her advocacy of militancy that she is remembered.

On 13 February 1908, Emmeline led a peaceful group of 12 women to parliament and was arrested for obstruction, still holding the rolled petition demanding the immediate enfranchisement of women in one hand, and a bunch of lilies in the other. She refused to be bound over and so was sentenced to six weeks in the Second Division. This was her first imprisonment and Emmeline never forgot the harshness and indignity of it, especially when she heard a woman in the cold cell next to hers sobbing and moaning as she gave birth, a woman whom she later learnt was awaiting trial on a charge that was found to be baseless.⁴⁰ The WSPU was never concerned with just the single issue of the vote but with wider social reforms that would bring equality for women, a theme that was to be



FIGURE 2.1 Emmeline Pankhurst c1908, June Purvis Private Suffrage Collection

increasingly emphasized over the next eight years. Women were campaigning, it was argued, for the parliamentary vote to reform ‘the evils that afflict society, especially those evils bearing directly on women themselves’.⁴¹ After this first imprisonment, Emmeline was to be arrested another 12 times before militancy ceased, on the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914.

On 24 March 1908, the eve of the Peckham Rye by-election, Emmeline gave a talk in which she offered a trenchant analysis of the gender divisions between the sexes, attacking the man-made double standards in marriage and divorce laws and in employment where women did not receive equal pay for equal work.⁴² The fight for the parliamentary vote soon became much harder when, the following month, Henry Asquith, a staunch opponent of women’s enfranchisement, became the new Liberal Prime Minister. As expected, Asquith refused to give facilities for a women’s enfranchisement bill that had already passed its second reading. However, he did say that the government intended to bring in a reform bill that would give an opportunity for a woman suffrage amendment, provided the amendment was on democratic lines and had the support of the women of the country, as well as the electorate.⁴³ Despite scepticism about the offer, the WSPU took up the challenge and planned the biggest procession yet, to be held in Hyde Park on 21 June.

That hot midsummer's day, in 1908, Emmeline led the seven colourful processions that converged in the park, attracting crowds of about half a million. Several bands played while 700 banners fluttered in the breeze, including one with a picture of Emmeline framed by the words 'Champion of Womanhood Famed Far for Deeds of Daring Rectitude'. About 40,000 demonstrators, with sashes in the WSPU's colours of purple (for dignity), white (for purity) and green (for hope), marched in the golden sunshine in their white dresses.⁴⁴ But Asquith was unimpressed and curtly replied that he had nothing to add to his previous statement.⁴⁵ This was a critical turning point for WSPU tactics since Emmeline felt the WSPU had 'exhausted argument', a view with which Christabel and Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence agreed. 'Either we can give up our agitation altogether', she reasoned, 'or ... go on acting, until the selfishness and obstinacy of the Government was broken down, or the Government themselves destroyed. Until forced to do so, the Government, we perceived, would never give women the vote'.⁴⁶ Asquith's provocation on this and subsequent occasions meant that militancy 'became a *reactive* phenomenon', each shift in militant tactics being a reasoned response to an obdurate government.⁴⁷ From now on militancy, which had largely involved heckling of MPs, civil disobedience and peaceful demonstration was gradually broadened to include more violent deeds, initially in the form of 'undirected and uncoordinated individual acts', such as window-breaking.⁴⁸

On 21 October 1908, Emmeline stood in the dock at Bow Street, together with Christabel and Flora Drummond, charged with incitement to disorder. Eight days earlier, she had addressed large crowds in Trafalgar Square where some 50,000 handbills had been distributed stating 'Men & Women, Help the Suffragettes to Rush the House of Commons on Tuesday Evening, 13th October, 1908, at 7.30'. Although the charming Christabel, who had a first class honours degree, acted as their lawyer and captured the headlines, it was Emmeline's poignant summing up on the final day of the trial that brought many of those present to tears. Positioning herself as a mother and hardworking widow, she explained how the aim of the WSPU's protests were to end the intolerable injustices of women:

[W]e are determined to go on with this agitation ... it is our duty to make this world a better place for women than it is to-day ... We are there not because we are law-breakers; we are there in our efforts to become law makers.⁴⁹

Despite Emmeline's pleading, the magistrate found the defendants guilty, ordering that they be bound over to keep the peace for 12 months, in default of which Emmeline and Flora would serve three months and Christabel ten weeks in the Second Division, where common criminals were placed. All three chose prison. To the fascinated public, Emmeline Pankhurst now became the 'embodiment of the nation's motherhood, striving magnificently for citizenship, churlishly thwarted and betrayed'.⁵⁰

As further deputations to parliament were unsuccessful, Marion Wallace-Dunlop, a sculptor and illustrator, decided on a new tactic that had a profound influence on the form and shape of militancy. On 5 July 1909, the imprisoned Marion, on her own initiative, went on hunger strike when her request to be treated as a political offender, and placed in the First Division, was turned down. After 91 hours of fasting, she was released. Other suffragettes followed her example but were less fortunate since, by the end of September, they were being forcibly fed. Forcible feeding was a painful, dangerous and degrading procedure performed by male doctors on struggling female bodies. Emmeline, fiercely protective of her followers, lost no time in joining with Christabel and Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence in condemning the government for inflicting upon the exhausted and starved women campaigning in a just cause 'the horrible outrage of the ... feeding tube'.⁵¹

In addition to such worries, private troubles now weighed heavily on Emmeline's shoulders. Her only surviving son, the 20-year-old Harry, became paralysed from the waist down. Needing money for his medical treatment, Emmeline felt she had no choice but to undertake her planned, lucrative tour of North America, although she confessed to one friend, 'I don't like going at all'.⁵² A theme in her speeches on the tour was the common bond between all women, irrespective of social class, as they fought for their democratic right to the vote. On her return to Britain, Emmeline heard the sad news that Harry would not recover. She was at her son's bedside when he died in early January 1910. Work ever being her refuge in times of sorrow, the broken-hearted Emmeline travelled to Manchester immediately after Harry's funeral on 10 January, since she was due to speak that evening at the Free Trade Hall. Some of the over 5,000 people waiting to hear her were determined to interrupt but were soon silenced by her words. 'Surely every mother here knows that I would rather be quiet to-night, by my own fireside with my sad thoughts, and it is only a sense of my great responsibility and duty in this campaign that has urged me to appear'.⁵³

To what extent the heavy losses sustained by the Liberals in the January 1910 general election were due to WSPU policy is debatable, but the Liberals were returned with no overall majority in the Commons, polling 275 seats against 272 for the Conservatives, 82 for the Irish Nationalists and 40 for Labour. Unfortunately, Asquith formed the new government, aware that the success of any legislation would be dependent upon support of MPs outside his own party. Realising that the political situation might be useful to the women's cause, Henry Brailsford, a radical journalist, set about forming a Conciliation Committee for Women's Suffrage which had the support of 54 MPs, across the political spectrum. Its aim was to draw up a bill that would find general favour. Despite her reservations, Emmeline supported the bill and on 31 January declared a halt to militancy, only peaceful and constitutional tactics to be used. With the exception of one week in November that year, militancy remained suspended for nearly two years.

On 14 July 1910, the first Conciliation Bill was introduced as a Private Member's Bill and passed its Second Reading in mid-July. But Asquith was

determined that the bill should not become law. On 18 November 1910, he announced that parliament, which had re-convened that day, would be dissolved in ten days' time and that in the intervening time priority would be given to government business. No mention was made of the Conciliation Bill. When Emmeline heard the news, while speaking at the Caxton Hall, she immediately led to the Commons a deputation of over 300 women, divided into contingents of 12. In a five-hour struggle that came to be known as 'Black Friday', the women were treated with exceptional brutality by the police who rather than arrest them tried to force them back. The assaults were not only physical but also sexual in nature. Women were kicked and punched, thrown to the ground, arms twisted, breasts pinched and knees thrusts between legs.⁵⁴ Emmeline's group included her sister Mary as well as the Indian Princess Sophia Duleep Singh. Sophia was not badly injured but Mary was. She died on Christmas Day. Emmeline was devastated. Last Christmas her son was dying, in the spring her mother had passed away, and now a much loved sister. 'How many must follow before the men of your Party realise their responsibility?' she asked C. P. Scott, the influential Liberal editor of the *Manchester Guardian*. 'Can you wonder that today I want beyond all other things to end this fight quickly & get rest?'⁵⁵

The WSPU renewed the truce on militancy in 1911. A second Conciliation Bill passed its Second Reading on 5 May but behind the scenes, Lloyd George, Chancellor of the Exchequer, was working against it and advocating instead a wider measure which would give the vote to every wife of a male elector, by virtue of her husband's qualification. When the anxious chair of the Conciliation Committee wrote to Asquith expressing his concerns, Asquith replied on 23 August, 'I have no hesitation in saying that the promises made by, and on behalf of the Government, in regard to giving facilities for the "Conciliation Bill", will be strictly adhered to, both in letter and in spirit'.⁵⁶ But given the structure of party politics, this Second and a Third Conciliation Bill were doomed to failure. The Liberals as well as the Conservatives were divided on the issue of women's suffrage and sought party advantage from any such measure. A narrow based bill that granted propertyed women the vote would benefit the Conservatives while a broader based measure would bring in working-class women for the Liberals.⁵⁷

By the autumn of 1911, Emmeline was weary and in poor health. Needing money for her youngest daughter Adela, who wanted to train as a gardener, she had planned another lucrative tour of North America. 'The voyage there and back always rests me', she told Christabel.⁵⁸ Emmeline was in Minneapolis on 7 November when she was cabled the devastating news that Asquith had announced that a Manhood Suffrage Bill would be introduced next parliamentary session which would allow amendment, if the Commons so desired, for the enfranchisement of women. Knowing that such a bill would not bring votes for women, when Emmeline returned to England in mid-January 1912, the words 'The women's revolution' were on her lips.⁵⁹

The women injured on 'Black Friday' had already told her that there would be less damage to their bodies and quicker arrests if they attacked property rather than

participate in legal marches.⁶⁰ Emmeline needed no such encouragement. On 16 February 1912, she announced calmly at a WSPU meeting that the weapon and argument that they were going to use at the next demonstration was the stone. '[W]e have made more progress with less hurt to ourselves by breaking glass than ever we made when we allowed them to break our bodies'.⁶¹

On 1 March 1912, the WSPU struck without warning. Emmeline broke windows in the Prime Minister's residence, at 10 Downing Street, while others smashed plate glass windows in shops in London's West End. In court the next day, she reminded the magistrate that women had failed to get the vote since they had failed to use the methods of agitation used by men. To support her cause, she argued that a member of the Liberal Government, Mr. Hobhouse, had recently pointed out that women had not proved their desire for the vote because they had done nothing akin to that which characterised men's protest in 1832, when they burnt down Nottingham Castle, and in 1867, when they tore down Hyde Park railings.⁶² The magistrate was unimpressed and sentenced Emmeline to two months in Holloway, in the Third Division.

After further unannounced window smashing in early March, the police had raided WSPU headquarters in order to arrest Christabel and the Pethick-Lawrences. They found only the latter. Warned of what was happening and fearing that the militant movement would be crushed if all of its leaders were in prison, Christabel was making her way to France where a political offender was not subject to extradition. From Paris she attempted to lead the movement. Meanwhile, Emmeline and the Pethick-Lawrences were committed for trial at the Central Criminal Court, the Old Bailey, on the charge of conspiracy.

The six-day trial began and ended in a blaze of publicity. During its closing days, when Emmeline addressed the court on 21 May, she stated poignantly how her experiences as a Poor Law Guardian had revealed to her the wretched living conditions of poor women and children, and how she had sought to change the law to help those less fortunate than herself. The militants of the WSPU were not criminals but political offenders, seeking political reform.⁶³ All three defendants were found guilty, Emmeline and Fred being also ordered to pay costs. Although sentenced to nine months in the Second Division, the three were soon moved to the First Division after protests from a wide range of people. However, since the other 78 imprisoned suffragettes were not granted a transfer, Emmeline and the Pethick-Lawrences went on hunger strike. When the doctor and wardresses opened Emmeline's cell door, with the intention of feeding her, she instantly grabbed a heavy earthenware jug, held it head high and cried, 'If any of you dares so much as to take one step inside this cell I shall defend myself'.⁶⁴ The potential intruders retreated. No attempt was ever made to forcibly feed her again. The Liberal Government feared that such an operation might severely weaken the already frail Mrs Pankhurst, even kill her, and did not want a martyr on their hands.

In poor health, the 54-year-old menopausal Emmeline (travelling under the name of 'Mrs. Richards') now made the first of many visits to Christabel in Paris

where she would rest and also discuss militant tactics. In early October 1912 the Pethick-Lawrences were ousted from the WSPU since they did not agree with the policy of escalating militancy.⁶⁵ Emmeline reasoned that the Pethick-Lawrences had become a liability. Neither she nor Fred had paid the costs of the conspiracy trial. While Emmeline had no assets for the government to seize, the country home of the wealthy Fred was occupied by bailiffs. Emmeline feared that the government would strip the Pethick-Lawrences of their assets, thus putting pressure on the WSPU to curb militancy. This might also encourage sympathetic suffragettes to raise funds for Fred and his wife, thus diverting income from the WSPU.⁶⁶

On 17 October 1912, Emmeline stood alone on the platform at the Albert Hall. With pathos in her voice she explained how militant women were victims rather than perpetrators of violence, including sexual violence against little girls and how this, and the White Slave traffic worldwide, would continue until an equal moral code for men and women was established. To cheering and applause, she then outlined the new militant policy:

There is something that Governments care for far more than they care for human life, and that is the security of property ... and so it is through property that we shall strike the enemy ... Be militant in your own way. Those of you who can express your militancy by going to the House of Commons and refusing to leave without satisfaction ... do so. Those of you who can express their militancy by facing party mobs at Cabinet Ministers' meetings, and remind them of their unfaithfulness to principle – do so. Those of you who can express your militancy by joining us in anti-Government by-election policy – do so. Those of you who can break windows ... do so.⁶⁷

Emmeline, already the inspirational leader of the WSPU now also became its Honorary Treasurer with responsibility for raising finances. This was a heavy extra task for her already over-burdened shoulders.

Refusing to be deflected from her course, Emmeline declared 'guerilla [sic] war' on the Liberal Government when, in early 1913, the duplicitous Asquith announced that the Manhood Suffrage Bill was dropped for that parliamentary session. Addressing large and enthusiastic audiences, she claimed that they were 'going to do as much damage to property as they could', in order to win the vote but never to endanger human life which was 'sacred'.⁶⁸ Over the next 18 months, the WSPU was driven increasingly underground as it engaged in the secret illegal destruction of both private and public property – setting fire to pillar boxes, cutting telegraph and telephone wires, raising false fire alarms, cutting 'Votes for Women' into men's golf courses, attacking art treasures and the arson and bombing of empty buildings. Throughout Emmeline insisted that she took full responsibility for all militant acts, even when she did not know about them in advance. On 24 February 1913 she was arrested for procuring and inciting women

to commit offences contrary to the Malicious Injuries to Property Act of 1861. The following day *The Standard* estimated that the total cost of seven years of militancy was £500,000 although the late Christopher Bearman puts the figure much higher.⁶⁹

Family worries intruded on the time Emmeline had to prepare for her trial at the Old Bailey. The physical condition of her second daughter, Sylvia, who had been forcibly fed shocked the anxious mother. 'She has lost 2 stones in the 5 weeks. Her eyes which were very bloodshot are getting better. How could they do it?' Emmeline wrote to a friend.⁷⁰ The unsettled Adela who had completed her agricultural course but was unemployed, was intending to travel to Italy, with Helen Archdale. 'I fear this means a very great expense for her', wrote the concerned Emmeline to her youngest daughter, '& I cannot help beyond giving you some money for personal expenses'.⁷¹ Despite these private troubles, Emmeline delivered a powerful, moving address at her trial which began on 2 April. Outlining the wrongs that women suffered, she pleaded that the only way to stop the WSPU agitation was 'by doing us justice'.⁷² This time she was sentenced to three years penal servitude. However, Emmeline served less than six weeks of her sentence since from now until August 1914, when war broke out, she exploited the Prisoners' Temporary Discharge for Ill-Health Act, commonly known as the 'Cat and Mouse Act', which received the Royal Assent on 25 April 1913.

The 'Cat and Mouse' Act allowed the prisoner whose health had been damaged through hunger striking to be released on a licence into the community, in order to be nursed back to health so that she would be fit enough to be re-admitted. Emmeline who went on hunger, thirst and sleep strikes that played havoc with her body, was now repeatedly in and out of prison, a 'mouse' on the run from the 'claws' of the state. It was while she was out on one such occasion that she tried to attend, on 14 June 1913, the funeral of Emily Wilding Davison who had died from injuries sustained after she ran onto the race course at the Derby some ten days earlier. Emmeline was rearrested and promptly went on hunger strike again. C. P. Scott was not alone in fearing that Mrs Pankhurst was 'being killed by inches'.⁷³

The WSPU's campaign had never been just about the vote but about wider reforms to bring equality for women and this focus now became much more prominent, especially after Christabel published in December 1913 her book *The Great Scourge and How to End It*. The key theme of *The Great Scourge* was the degrading effect on women and the British nation generally of prostitution and venereal disease. Man-made laws and man-made morality upheld a double moral standard whereby sexuality was organised in men's interests and around notions of men's uncontrollable urges. Emmeline readily embraced the moral crusade that Christabel had initiated to end the double sexual standard that kept women subordinate.

Family matters relating to Emmeline's two youngest daughter, both socialists, now had to be dealt with. In early 1914, Sylvia and Adela were asked to come to Paris to discuss matters with their mother and with Christabel. Sylvia was told that

her association with the WSPU was ended since the organisation she had founded, the East London Federation of the Suffragettes, was allied to the Labour Party, contrary to WSPU policy. The restless, unhappy Adela agreed with her mother that she would be better off in Australia. Emmeline gave Adela her fare and £20, all that she could spare.⁷⁴ Yet again, Emmeline exercised iron discipline. Passionate about the women's cause, she would make no exceptions, even for her own family.

Still subject to her three-year sentence, Emmeline managed to evade detectives and travel from Paris to England, as she frequently did. On 21 May 1914, she led a deputation to the King and was among those arrested as Inspector Rolfe, crushing her in his arms, lifted her to a waiting car.⁷⁵ This was the last national militant event. The police made further raids on WSPU headquarters and private dwellings as they tried to crush the suffragette movement.

With the outbreak of the First World War in early August 1914, the Liberal Government released all imprisoned suffragettes and Emmeline called a temporary suspension of militancy. Emmeline now became a 'patriotic feminist', urging her followers to engage in war work which, she believed, would help to bring about their enfranchisement, as well as freeing up men to go to the war front.⁷⁶ She also spoke at recruiting rallies. No longer the platform agitator she was regarded with 'no little respect and even with something like affection'.⁷⁷ But Emmeline's financial status became increasingly precarious, especially after she adopted four 'war babies' in the autumn of 1915, and in 1916 she went on a fund-raising tour of Canada.

Emmeline believed that Lloyd George, who replaced Asquith as Prime Minister in December 1916, would bring in a women's suffrage bill. Indeed, there was a strong rumour that he had promised this when he sought her help the year before to lead a procession to encourage women to engage in war work.⁷⁸ Franchise reform was now being actively discussed since many soldiers and sailors fighting for their country were not enfranchised either. Emmeline's leadership of the assertive, imaginative and sometimes violent militant women's suffrage campaign, plus her wise strategy to encourage her followers to support the war effort, meant that the just demand of votes for women could no longer be ignored.

On 6 February 1918, the Representation of the People Act received the Royal Assent, granting the parliamentary vote to women aged 30 years and more who were householders, wives of householders, occupiers of property of £5 or more annual value, or university graduates. Since all men aged 21 years and more were to be granted the vote, younger if they had served in the war, irrespective of property qualifications, the bill fell short of that political equality with men for which Emmeline and the suffragettes had campaigned. Both Emmeline and Christabel had reluctantly accepted Lloyd George's argument that this limited bill would be acceptable to the majority of parliament which regarded an equal franchise as far too radical a measure that would swamp the male electorate.⁷⁹ Nearly eight and a half million women were enfranchised, about two thirds of the female adult population.

After the First World War ended in November 1918, Emmeline needed to earn her living. For a few years she lived in Canada, lecturing for the Canadian National Council for Combating Venereal Diseases. After a short time spent in Bermuda and then in the South of France, running a tea shop, she returned to England before Christmas 1925, nearly penniless. Impressed with the way Stanley Baldwin, the Conservative Prime Minister, handled a General Strike in May 1926 and knowing of his commitment to bring in an equal franchise bill, she was soon standing as a candidate for the Conservative party.⁸⁰ Emmeline passed away before the general election took place. She died on 14 June 1928, just a few weeks before the Equal Franchise Bill, granting equal voting right to women, rights—thus equal voting rights to men, became law on 2 July.

Emmeline Pankhurst became a militant through a range of personal, social and political factors, particularly the intransigence of the Liberal Government of the day in granting women their democratic right to the parliamentary vote. Her passionate advocacy of militant tactics made women's suffrage a topic of discussion throughout the land after nearly 40 years of fruitless debate. Committed to women's rights rather than to any of the male dominated political parties of her day, she politicised thousands of women from all social classes to join a women's movement that has been unparalleled in British history.

On 6 March 1930, Stanley Baldwin, a former Conservative Prime Minister, unveiled a statue to her in Victoria Tower Gardens, close to the Houses of Parliament. 'I say with no fear of contradiction', he announced, 'that whatever view posterity may take Mrs. Pankhurst has won for herself a niche in the Temple of Fame which will last for all time'.⁸¹ Emmeline Pankhurst shaped an idea of assertive women campaigning for their equal rights, an idea that is still relevant for our generation.

Notes

- 1 Marina Warner, 'Emmeline Pankhurst – Time 100 People of the Century', *Time Magazine*, June 14, 1999.
- 2 '100 Women Who Changed the World', *BBC History Magazine*, September 2018, 59–66. Throughout this chapter I shall often refer to Emmeline Pankhurst by her first name.
- 3 Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, *My Part in a Changing World* (London: Gollancz, 1938), 151.
- 4 Krista Cowman, "What Was Suffragette Militancy? An exploration of the British Example," in *Suffrage, Gender and Citizenship: International Perspectives on Parliamentary Reforms*, eds. Irma Sulkunen, Seija-Leena Nevala-Nurmi and Pirjo Markkola (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 299–322.
- 5 See June Purvis, "Did Militancy Help or Hinder the Granting of Women's Suffrage in Britain?" *Women's History Review* 28, no. 7 (2019), 1200–1217 for discussion of this. Some historians question the shortcomings of identifying the term 'militant' mainly with the WSPU. See Sandra Stanley Holton, *Feminism and Democracy: Women's Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain 1900–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) Chapter 2 and Laura E. Nym Mayhall, *The Militant Suffrage Movement: Citizenship and Resistance in Britain, 1860–1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). Holton emphasizes that the conventional dichotomy between the 'militants' of the WSPU and

the ‘constitutionalists’ of the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies is not rigid and tidy.

- 6 *Votes for Women* (hereafter *VfW*), December 31, 1908, 230. For biographies of Emmeline see E. Sylvia Pankhurst (hereafter ESP), *The Life of Emmeline Pankhurst: The Suffragette Struggle for Women’s Citizenship* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1935); Paula Bartley, *Emmeline Pankhurst* (London: Routledge, 2002) and June Purvis, *Emmeline Pankhurst: A Biography* (London: Routledge, 2002).
- 7 Emmeline Pankhurst (hereafter EP), *My Own Story* (London: Eveleigh, 1914), 8.
- 8 ESP, *Emmeline*, 7–8 and Purvis, *Emmeline*, 9–11.
- 9 Bartley, *Emmeline*, 17.
- 10 EP, *My Own Story*, 1.
- 11 EP, *My Own Story*, 3.
- 12 Sandra Stanley Holton, “In Sorrowful Wrath: Suffrage Militancy and the Romantic Feminism of Emmeline Pankhurst,” in *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Harold L. Smith (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1990), 7–24.
- 13 EP, *My Own Story*, 9.
- 14 ESP, *Emmeline*, 15.
- 15 Christabel Pankhurst (hereafter CP), *Unshackled: The Story of How We Won the Vote* (London: Hutchinson, 1959), 21–22.
- 16 *Women’s Suffrage Journal*, March 1, 1880, 50.
- 17 ESP, *The Suffragette Movement: An Intimate Account of Persons and Ideals* (London: Longman, 1931), 57.
- 18 EP, *My Own Story*, 13.
- 19 Rebecca West, ‘Mrs. Pankhurst’ in *The Post Victorians*, with an Introduction by the Very Reverend W.R. Inge (London: Ivor Nicholson, 1933), 483.
- 20 Sandra Stanley Holton, “Now You See It, Now You Don’t: the Women’s Franchise League and Its Place in Contending Narratives of the Women’s Suffrage Movement,” in *The Women’s Suffrage Movement: New Feminist Perspectives*, eds. Maroula Joannou and June Purvis (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998 and 2009), 15–36.
- 21 CP, *Unshackled*, 32.
- 22 EP, *My Own Story*, 27.
- 23 EP, *My Own Story*, 28.
- 24 Ben Griffin, *The Politics of Gender in Victorian Britain: Masculinity, Political Cultures and the Struggle for Women’s Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 13.
- 25 Boggart Ho’ Clough, *Labour Leader*, July 11, 1896.
- 26 CP, *Unshackled*, 37.
- 27 Purvis, *Emmeline*, 55.
- 28 EP, *My Own Story*, 32.
- 29 EP, *My Own Story*, 34.
- 30 Purvis, *Emmeline*, 67.
- 31 EP, *My Own Story*, 38.
- 32 Purvis, *Christabel Pankhurst: A Biography* (London: Routledge, 2018), 92–94.
- 33 Evelyn Sharp, ‘Emmeline Pankhurst and Militant Suffrage’, *Nineteenth Century*, April 1930, 518–19.
- 34 EP, *My Own Story*, 59.
- 35 Teresa Billington-Greig, ‘The Difference in the Women’s Movement’, *Forward*, November 23, 1907.
- 36 Fred Pethick-Lawrence, *Fate Has Been Kind* (Hutchinson, n.d.[1943]), 75–76.
- 37 Purvis, *Emmeline*, 99.
- 38 Cecily Hamilton, *Life Errant* (London: Dent, 1935), 77.
- 39 West, ‘Mrs. Pankhurst’, 479–80.
- 40 EP, *My Own Story*, 102.
- 41 EP, *My Own Story*, 57.
- 42 Mrs. Pankhurst, *The Importance of the Vote* (London: The Woman’s Press, n.d.), 8.

- 43 ESP, *Suffragette Movement*, 282.
- 44 *Daily Chronicle* and *The Times*, June 22, 1908.
- 45 *The Times*, June 24, 1908.
- 46 EP, *My Own Story*, 116.
- 47 Ann Morley with Liz Stanley, *The Life and Death of Emily Wilding Davison* (London: The Women's Press, 1988), 153.
- 48 Sandra Stanley Holton, *Suffrage Days: Stories from the Women's Suffrage Movement* (London: Routledge, 1996), 134.
- 49 "Speeches from the Dock," *VfW*, October 29, 1908, 82.
- 50 ESP, *Emmeline*, 81.
- 51 Letter signed by Emmeline, Christabel and Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, *The Times*, September 29, 1909.
- 52 EP to Miss Birstingl, July 30, 1909, Jill Craigie Collection, The Women's Library at LSE (hereafter TWL).
- 53 Una Dugdale, "Memories of Mrs. Pankhurst," June Purvis Private Suffrage Collection.
- 54 Caroline Morrell, 'Black Friday': *Violence against Women in the Suffragette Movement* (London: Women's Research and Resources Centre Publications, 1981); Andrew Rosen, *Rise Up Women! The Militant Campaign of the Women's Social and Political Union 1903–1914* (London: Routledge, 1974), 138–145 and Diane Atkinson, *Rise Up Women! The Remarkable Lives of the Suffragettes* (London: Bloomsbury 2018), 222–227.
- 55 EP to C. P. Scott, December 27, 1910, C. P. Scott Papers, John Rylands University Library, University of Manchester.
- 56 *VfW*, August 25, 1911, 754.
- 57 Richard Toye, *Lloyd George & Churchill: Rivals for Greatness* (London: Macmillan, 2007), 77.
- 58 CP, *Unshackled*, 186
- 59 ESP, *Emmeline*, 103.
- 60 Purvis, *Emmeline*, 152.
- 61 Mrs. Pankhurst, 'The argument of the broken pane', *VfW*, February 23, 1912, 319
- 62 *VfW*, March 8, 1912, 360.
- 63 *VfW*, May 24, 1912, 531–34.
- 64 EP, *My Own Story*, 255.
- 65 Purvis, *Emmeline*, 194–199 and Kathryn Atherton, *Suffragette Planners and Plotters: The Pankhurst, Pethick-Lawrence Story* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2019), 92–110.
- 66 Purvis, *Christabel*, 293.
- 67 *The Suffragette*, October 25, 1912, 17.
- 68 *The Suffragette*, January 31, 1913, 240.
- 69 C. J. Bearman, "An Examination of Suffragette Violence," *English Historical Review*, 2005, CXX, no. 46, 365–97.
- 70 EP to Elizabeth Robins, n.d. [March 25, 1913?], Elizabeth Robins Papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.
- 71 EP to Adela, n.d. [c. March 25, 1913], Craigie Collection, TWL.
- 72 *The Suffragette*, April 11, 1913, 422–23
- 73 C. P. Scott to David Lloyd George, June 28, 1913, Lloyd George Papers, House of Lords Record Office, London.
- 74 Purvis, *Emmeline*, 232–49.
- 75 Purvis, *Emmeline*, 259–60
- 76 Nicoletta Gullace, "*The Blood of Our Sons*": *Men, Women and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship during the Great War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 117–41.
- 77 Rupert Butler, *As They Saw Her... Emmeline Pankhurst* (London: Harrap, 1970), 105.
- 78 Jill Craigie, *Radio Times*, March 9, 1951.
- 79 Purvis, *Christabel*, 401.
- 80 Bartley, *Emmeline*, 226.
- 81 *The Times*, March 7, 1930.

1

MILLICENT FAWCETT (1847–1929)

The making of a politician

Elizabeth Crawford

Among its several definitions of ‘a politician’, the Oxford English Dictionary describes such a person as one ‘who is keenly interested in practical politics, or who engages in political strife’. From the age of twenty Millicent Garrett Fawcett (1847–1929) devoted herself to practical politics and, as a consequence, her days were dominated by political strife. Born in the mid-19th century, brought up in a small East Anglian town and benefitting from little formal education, for much of her life she directed the constitutional movement to enfranchise women, actively engaging with the political machine, a machine that had evolved over the centuries to run a patriarchal society. How was it that she accrued the knowledge and authority to become a politician?

In the case of Millicent Fawcett the person was political and the political personal. Her initiation into the political sphere began on an April evening in 1865 when, aged 17, she attended a party in Aubrey House, the Kensington home of a radical Liberal MP, Peter Taylor, and his wife Clementia (Mentia). Taylor was a partner in the thriving firm of Courtaulds and the couple were very wealthy and very philanthropic, supporting all the radical causes of the day. The party was one of their fortnightly salons to which were invited radicals of every persuasion, artists and poets as well as politicians. That April evening the atmosphere was particularly electric as many of the guests were involved in a by-election campaign for which a member of the Taylors’ circle, the philosopher John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), was one of the candidates. The by-election was for the Westminster constituency and Mill was backed by not only the Taylors and others of their generation but also by a group of energetic young women, one of whom, Elizabeth Garrett (1836–1917), had just qualified as Britain’s first woman doctor. The Mill campaign was considered so exciting that Millicent Garrett, one of Elizabeth’s younger sisters, had come to London for the occasion.

As the great and the good gathered in Aubrey House news of the assassination of Abraham Lincoln had just reached England and, commenting on it, Millicent Garrett exclaimed that she thought this a greater single calamity than ‘the loss of any of the crowned heads of Europe’.¹ Her remark was overheard by another guest, who immediately asked to be introduced to her. That guest was Henry Fawcett (1833–1884), then in his early 30s, already professor of political economy at Cambridge and later that year to be elected Liberal MP for Brighton. Fawcett had achieved all this despite being totally blind. Although it is thought she never knew, within a few days of meeting Millicent, Henry Fawcett proposed marriage to her elder sister, Elizabeth, who told of the proposal in a letter to her parents, explaining that she had turned him down because, as she had qualified as a doctor so recently, she was determined to practise and did not think this would be possible if she were Henry’s wife. Feelings were not mentioned, the Garretts being practical women. Indeed, one acquaintance commented of Millicent some years later that ‘there is no doubt that there is something hard about the Garretts’.² This trait was doubtless inherited from their father, Newson Garrett (1812–1893), a Suffolk man who went to London to seek his fortune. There he married and was set up in a pawn-broking shop at Whitechapel where the first members of his family of six daughters and five sons were born. The pawn-broking business prospered but after the death of a young son Newson resolved to take his children away from unhealthy London and in 1841 returned to Suffolk. He settled in Aldeburgh and, with a small amount of capital, bought a corn and coal business. It was at Aldeburgh that Millicent was born in 1847, the fifth of the Garrett daughters.

Newson Garrett’s business and its position were well chosen and, riding on the crest of Britain’s mid-19th century prosperity, he had the opportunity of developing his enterprise in a number of interlinking directions, becoming an important figure in Aldeburgh. He was very much a ‘can do’ sort of man, another trait inherited by his daughters. As Elizabeth wrote ‘My strength lies in the extra amount of daring which I have as a family endowment. All Garretts have it and I am a typical member of the race and so can’t help it any more than I can help being like them in face and physique. There’s a deal in blood I think’.³

Newson Garrett’s daring did not always make life easy; his finances were notably volatile and his family learned to accommodate themselves to changes in income. For instance, he was keen for his daughters to receive a good education but, despite this intention, a temporary crisis in Newson’s affairs led to Millicent’s formal schooling being cut short before she was sixteen. Millicent’s mother, Louisa Garrett (1813–1903), was very much more conservative than her husband, providing the ballast that kept the family ship on an even keel. Even though, on occasion, she did not approve of the ways in which her daughters were directing their lives, she was always supportive.

Apart from the idiosyncrasy of having a doctor for a daughter, the Garretts’ family life proceeded reasonably conventionally. The eldest daughter, Louisa, had married the son of a local family, owners of a large drapery establishment in London, and a couple of months after the Aubrey House encounter Millicent and

her sister Agnes, while staying with Louisa, were taken to one of the few election meetings at which Mill actually appeared. A visiting American has left a lively description of that meeting: 'Jostling together in most admired disorder and propinquity were representatives of the working classes, of trade, of all the professions, with an obvious sprinkling of eager college students; while there was not lacking what, indeed, is usual at English political meetings, the presence of ladies on the platform and in the front seats'.⁴

Henry Fawcett, who was elected MP for Brighton in 1865, was actively involved in Mill's campaign and both men supported the idea of granting the parliamentary franchise to women on the same terms as it was given to men. In *Considerations of Representative Government*, published in 1861, Mill had expressly stated that a difference of sex was 'as entirely irrelevant to political rights, as difference in height, or in the colour of the hair'.⁵ So, once Mill had been elected, at a time when a Reform bill to extend the franchise was under discussion, the women who had backed him began to consider the possibility of attempting to make some move towards campaigning for their own enfranchisement. The result was that in May 1866 a small informal committee was formed to put together a petition that Mill would present to parliament.

Elizabeth Garrett was one of the committee members and, with her friend Emily Davies, met Henry Fawcett and John Stuart Mill on 7 June 1866 at the House of Commons to hand over the petition containing the names of 1521 women.⁶ In Aldeburgh the petition slips had been handed around by Millicent and Agnes Garrett (who were both too young themselves to sign) and had attracted the signatures of a wide range of women, from the vicar's wife to a lodging-house keeper.

A year later, on 20 May 1867, John Stuart Mill stood up in the House of Commons to move, unsuccessfully, that clauses of the Reform Bill should be amended to omit the word 'man' and substitute 'person'. Watching him from the Ladies' Gallery was Mrs Millicent Garrett Fawcett, a bride of less than a month. Marriage to Henry Fawcett was to be the making of her as a politician, providing her with both an education and a professional career as a writer on economics and politics and as a 'political woman'.

In the earliest extant photograph of Henry and Millicent as a married couple Millicent is sitting on a low chair at Henry's side, an initial first impression suggesting a teacher/pupil relationship.⁷ Yet Millicent was not without agency, for Henry depended on her as both reader and amanuensis. Although in her autobiography Millicent Fawcett mentions that she acted as Henry's secretary only until 1871, when he employed in that position Frederick John Dryhurst (1855–1931), I would suggest that Millicent's work for Henry continued long after he acquired a professional secretary.⁸ Looking, for instance, at collections of letters from Henry Fawcett to Gladstone and to his publisher, Alexander Macmillan, virtually every letter, even those after 1871, is in Millicent's hand, the letters to Gladstone covering a wide range of parliamentary business, including discussions of bills and parliamentary procedure.⁹

So as she read to Henry and wrote to his dictation Millicent was learning, literally at his knee, something of both elements of his work, plunged into the contemporary debates on political economy and discovering at first hand the workings of parliament. This early photograph was taken sometime in 1868 and, as there is no sign of pregnancy, probably after the birth in April of the Fawcetts' only daughter, Philippa (1868–1948). That was also the month that Millicent saw her first article in print, 'The Education of Women of the Middle and Upper Classes' appearing in *Macmillan's Magazine*. For Millicent's marriage had brought her into contact with not only the worlds of higher education and practical politics but also with that of publishing and there is no doubt that her path into print was eased by the close association that existed between Henry Fawcett and the publishing house of Macmillan's, founded in Cambridge 20 years earlier. Henry had first published an article in *Macmillan's Magazine* in 1860 and the firm published his *Manual of Political Economy* in 1863, the year in which he was appointed professor of political economy. Running into eight editions and proving a success for both author and publisher, it was, in effect, an abridgement, written as a textbook for undergraduates, of Mill's *Principles of Political Economy*. Henry Fawcett had become a close friend of Alexander Macmillan, who, a month before the publication of Millicent's article, wrote, 'I was sorry Mrs Fawcett's paper was not in our last number. It certainly will be in the next. If for no better reason than that *Room for the ladies* is clearly the cry of the day'.¹⁰ *Macmillan's Magazine* gave women a medium in which to express ideas on social reform while addressing an audience far wider than that reached by the specifically feminist journals. Millicent published three further articles in *Macmillan's Magazine*, two of which were among eight she contributed to a collection of fourteen that, under the title *Essays and Lectures on Social and Political Subjects*, she and Henry published with Macmillan in 1872. Henry noted in his preface that 'the labour involved in editing the Volume has fallen entirely on my wife'.¹¹ In March 1872 Henry Fawcett, with Millicent acting as amanuensis, entered into a short correspondence to negotiate royalty terms. Publisher and author may have been friends, but both they and, as she was to prove in later years, Millicent were men of business.¹²

In the same year, while engaged in producing *Essays and Lectures*, the Fawcetts sat to the artist Ford Madox Brown for a double portrait showing them posed more equally than in the photographs taken four years earlier. Indeed, Millicent, seated on the arm of his chair, is this time raised above Henry. She has one arm, pen in her hand, around his shoulders, while the other, entwined with his, is holding out a letter towards him. He is gesticulating and appears to be speaking, as though discussing with her its contents. Signed by them both as 'Your Obt. Servants', it is obviously intended for an official correspondent. The portrait was commissioned not by the Fawcetts but by Sir Charles Dilke (1843–1911), a member, like Henry, of the Radical wing of the Liberal party. The suggestion that a proposed portrait of Henry should also include Millicent seems initially to have come from the artist.¹³ That the commissioner and sitters quickly acquiesced suggests that all concerned wished to highlight the Fawcetts' effectiveness as a

couple. That the document chosen for inclusion in the portrait was a joint effort, rather than one for which Millicent acted as a mere amanuensis, emphasises her autonomy and suggests that the intention was most definitely to depict the Fawcetts as partners working together in the public sphere.¹⁴

Essays and Lectures, the volume of collected essays, was not, in fact, Millicent's first book. In 1870 Macmillan had published her *Political Economy for Beginners*, the idea for which had come to her as she helped Henry prepare the third edition of his *Manual of Political Economy*. As the latter simplified Mill's *Principles of Political Economy*, so Millicent's book simplified Henry's, aiming to instruct those even lower down the educational ladder, that is, to appeal both to working men and women and to school children. In the preface to the first edition she mentions that she hopes the existence of the book 'would perhaps be an assistance to those who are desirous of introducing the study of Political Economy into schools. It is mainly with the hope that a short and elementary book might help to make Political Economy a more popular study in boys' and girls' schools that the following pages have been written'.¹⁵ Her effort had the approval of Mill himself, who, on hearing of Millicent's writing project, wrote to the economist John Elliot Cairnes, 'I have a high opinion of Mrs Fawcett's capabilities, and am always glad to hear of any fresh exercise of them'.¹⁶ Around the same time Alexander Macmillan wrote to a correspondent, 'Mrs Fawcett is doing a little book to teach girls. I read one half of it in MS., and I learned more Political Economy than I knew before. I think it should supersede the Mrs Marcets and the like wholly'.¹⁷ As Mrs Marcet's *Conversations on Political Economy* had been published 60 years previously, there was doubtless scope for a new approach to the subject. Millicent Fawcett's book proved immensely successful, running into ten editions and was still in print well into the third decade of the 20th century.

In 1874 Macmillan published Millicent Fawcett's *Tales in Political Economy*, which, as she explained in the foreword, plagiarised the idea that Harriet Martineau had 'made so popular thirty years ago, of hiding the powder, Political Economy, in the raspberry jam of the story'.¹⁸ The policy of self-help and *laissez-faire* advocated by Mill and the Fawcetts was summed up some years later when Millicent wrote, 'What women are asking for in education and in industrial and professional work is a fair field and no favour. We want every woman, as far as may be, to have the chance of developing whatever capacity or talent Nature may have endowed her with, not only by school and college training, but by opening careers where first-rate capacities should be put to first-rate work. This is a very important branch of the national economy – to get the best work out of the best brains the nation produces, whether those brains are in male or female heads'.¹⁹ Thus spoke the political economist. Women wished to receive opportunities equal to those enjoyed by men, opportunities to achieve or fail; they did not wish to be corralled into 'feminine' areas of employment in any sector of the economy, whether 'professional' or 'working-class', prevented from undertaking work that a patriarchal parliament considered unsuitable, or forced, ostensibly for their own good, to work fewer hours than men and, consequently, to receive less pay, with

all the social consequences that were certain to follow. Her political economy books may be elementary primers, but they reveal both Millicent Fawcett's detailed grasp of the subject as it was in 1870 and as it developed over the years. It is essential for a politician, male or female, to have an understanding of economics and Millicent had seized the opportunity offered to make the subject her own.

Millicent's first article on women's suffrage, 'The Electoral Disabilities of Women', appeared in the May 1870 issue of *The Fortnightly Review* and was based on speeches she had made in the run up to the House of Commons debate on the bill 'For the Removal of the Electoral Disabilities of Women'. For, although too young to sign the 1866 petition, a year later Millicent had been present at the first meeting of the executive committee of a new society, the London National Society for Women's Suffrage, and on 17 July 1869 made her debut as a speaker on a public platform at a London meeting of the society. In her autobiography she wrote 'I was terrified by the ordeal of my first speech, but scraped through somehow'.²⁰ A couple of months later John Stuart Mill wrote to Mentia Taylor that he had suggested to Mrs Fawcett that she should address a public meeting for, 'The cause has now reached a point at which it has become extremely desirable that the ladies who lead the movement should make themselves visible to the public, their very appearance being a refutation of the vulgar nonsense talked about "women's rights women", and their manner of looking, moving, and speaking being sure to make a favourable impression from the purely feminine as well as from the human point of view'.²¹

Thus, on 23 March 1870, Millicent made her debut on the lecture circuit, giving her 'Electoral Disabilities of Women' lecture in Brighton, a town in which, with her husband its MP, she could expect to be received with sympathy. She very quickly attracted the attention of *Punch*, who in an address to 'Mrs Professor Fawcett' dwelt on the alarming prospect of 'two Fawcetts in the field – or rather on the Commons – at once, and one of them in petticoats'.²² Still only 22 years old, Millicent was thus named by a very popular journal, albeit facetiously, as a coming politician. She repeated the lecture on several occasions that year, even venturing with it as far as Dublin and was back on the trail again in March 1871, in the company of the rich and beautiful Lillas Ashworth, niece of John Bright, speaking at Bath, Bristol, Exeter, Taunton, Plymouth and Tavistock.²³ Lillas later wrote of Millicent, 'I had never met her before and can always recall her girlish figure when she stepped out of the train at Bath station'. She also mentioned that at 'several of the meetings there were cheers for Prof Fawcett because of his unselfish kindness in sparing his wife – on whom he was so specially dependent – to go forth and plead for this new gospel. It was felt that there must be deep meaning in a cause which could thus command his sympathy'.²⁴

Among the active suffrage campaigners at this time were Millicent's sister Agnes and her cousin Rhoda who in 1872 both broke with the London National Society for Women's Suffrage in order to join the executive committee of a new society, the Central Committee of the National Society for Women's Suffrage, formed in London by the Manchester Society for Women's Suffrage. At this stage Millicent

remained faithful to the London society, tied by loyalty to Mill, who was still its main adviser. The split was ideological rather than geographical; the London Society was considered by the Manchester Society to be insufficiently active and the London Society, in its turn, objected to the involvement of members of the Manchester Society in campaigns, such as that to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts, feeling that it might sully the purity of the suffrage cause.

After the defeat of yet another suffrage bill a large public meeting was held in London's Hanover Square Rooms on 10 May 1872. Factional difficulties were put aside and Millicent Fawcett of the London National Society appeared as a speaker on the platform alongside Lydia Becker and Rhoda Garrett from the Central Committee. During the course of her speech Millicent Fawcett declared that 'The real protection women needed was the power to protect themselves'.²⁵

Until her death at the end of 1882 Rhoda Garrett was the star speaker for the suffrage cause. On 6 May 1880 she was the principal speaker at the 'National Demonstration' at St James's Hall in Piccadilly, while Millicent spoke at an 'overflow' meeting that had hastily been arranged to accommodate the too-large audience. By the time that meeting was held things had changed, differences had been buried, and the London National Society had amalgamated with the Central Committee of the National Society for Women's Suffrage and, with Agnes, Millicent became a member of its executive committee. At a public meeting in London, held in St James' Hall on 24 April 1882, one of the speakers referred to Mrs Fawcett 'as being the mainstay of this movement from its commencement [and that she] had supported this movement from the beginning, both at meetings of this sort and by her pen (Cheers)'.²⁶

The years between 1880 and 1884 were a time of optimism and the suffrage campaigners thought that by developing a populist movement, holding mass meetings in provincial cities and in London, such as that in St James' Hall, they would convince parliament to include them in the proposed new Reform Bill. However, although the 1884 Reform Act extended the franchise to new classes of men, women were still totally excluded. Henry Fawcett was one of three members of the government who abstained from voting against an amendment to include some women, thereby defying a five-line whip and incurring Gladstone's wrath.

A few months later Henry was dead. Grief necessarily curtailed Millicent's public activities for a time but by 1886 she was again presiding at meetings of the Central Committee and lecturing around the country. In 1888, now settled into life with Agnes at 2 Gower Street in Bloomsbury and with Philippa spending term-time at Newnham College in Cambridge, Millicent was not prevented by any ties of marital or maternal duty from embarking on an even-more consuming involvement in the suffrage campaign. For in that year, when dissension grew within the Central Committee as to whether or not to allow other women's organisations to affiliate, she was the leader of the faction that wished to maintain the *status quo*. In the 1886 split in the Liberal party over Home Rule she had sided with the Liberal Unionists (that is she opposed Gladstone and Home Rule) and now had no wish for the Central Committee to be influenced by members of the

Gladstone-ite Women's Liberal Federation, who would be the most likely beneficiary to any change of rules. While the majority departed to reconstitute itself as the Central National Society, Millicent became honorary secretary of the rump of the Central Committee and after Lydia Becker's death in 1890 gravitated naturally to the forefront of the suffrage movement as its intellectual leader.

A glance at the catalogue of Millicent's papers shows the wide range of women-centred campaigns in which she took an interest during this time, principally as one of the founders of Newnham College, providing higher education for women, and of the Ladies Residential Chambers scheme launched by her sister Agnes to provide working middle-class women with purpose-built accommodation.²⁷ On morality, especially sexual morality, Millicent took a hard line. Her political campaigning was not reserved to suffrage for, as a vice president of the National Vigilance Association she was involved with W.T. Stead in the 'Maiden Tribute' campaign that led to the raising of the age of majority from 13 years to 16 years and then also in the campaign to abolish child marriage in India. Her cousin, Edmund Garrett, touched on this aspect of her character in an article published in Stead's *Review of Reviews*, writing 'Of the duties of parentage and the responsibilities of sex relationship, she has the highest and most uncompromising ideals The one thing that she cannot away with is doubleness. Anything the least "shady" in quite small matters of money or of conduct damns a man at once'.²⁸ It was not only men who were severely judged in these matters, as Elizabeth Wolstenholme, a dedicated suffrage campaigner, found to her cost when the results of her attempt to live a life of 'free love' came to Millicent's attention.

During the 1890s, with no new large measure of reform of the parliamentary vote for men under consideration and with little success in getting their own bills heard, the women's suffrage movement relied on public campaigning, attempting to keep the subject in front of the press and parliament by holding frequent meetings and in 1893 organizing a 'Special Appeal from Women of All Parties and All Classes'. This was intended to be so spectacularly large that it could not be ignored by parliament. Millicent Fawcett was the Appeal's president and told one of the many meetings she addressed that the women's movement 'was becoming a real, permanent political force in the country'.²⁹ In 1896 the petition with its 257,796 signatures was presented to Parliament, which quite happily ignored it. Later that year Millicent was chosen to preside at a conference held in Birmingham, as a result of which, in 1897, the disparate suffrage societies reunited as the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS). The formation of the NUWSS gave strength to the movement, allowing for the smoothing over of past political differences. In 1907, when the NUWSS adopted a new constitution and strengthened its organisational structure, Millicent became its first president, a position she held until 1919.

Millicent Fawcett's standing as a political leader was enhanced in 1901 by her appointment to lead an, unprecedented, all-women commission to South Africa to investigate the camps – concentration camps – set up by the British. Despite the fact that her initial response had been to defend the actions of the British government, her report, published in 1902, just three months before the end of the

war, was considered even by many of the pro-Boer element to be just and fair. This investigation, conducted in such a professional manner, represented another milestone on the road to women's emancipation.

Her involvement in the wider political world stood Millicent in good stead as the suffrage movement entered its long final phase, which can be dated from the founding in Manchester in October 1903 of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). Led by Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughter Christabel, this group was not interested in affiliation with the NUWSS but was prepared to agitate in pursuance of 'votes for women' in ways that had never been contemplated by the societies with which Millicent Fawcett had been associated. Millicent Fawcett was to term these methods 'revolutionary' in contrast to her own society's 'constitutional' lobbying.

The difference between the two groupings was clearly seen for the first time in October 1905 when Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenney not only acted in such a manner at a political meeting that caused them to be arrested but then chose to go to prison rather than pay a fine, ensuring that their actions received maximum publicity from a press that had hitherto paid little heed to the suffrage campaign. Millicent Fawcett initially refused to condemn this mild militancy, although acknowledging that its tactics would not be adopted by the NUWSS. She was concerned that those working for the same end should not turn against each other, even when later she felt severely tried by the damage the WSPU was doing to the cause. On 11 December 1906 she even arranged a banquet at the Savoy hotel to welcome members of the WSPU on their release from Holloway. The WSPU had now moved from Manchester to London to concentrate their attention on the seat of power, quickly gathering members from all walks of life. Some women who had worked for the constitutional societies saw the attraction of the more direct action taken by the WSPU and switched allegiance from the NUWSS.

In February 1907 the NUWSS took to the London streets for the first time in a procession that quickly earned the soubriquet 'the Mud March' on account of the state of the streets that day. Lady Frances Balfour noted in her autobiography that 'Mrs Fawcett thoroughly enjoyed it, and pirouetted through her part as leader with the step of a girl of seventeen'.³⁰ Millicent, attired in the doctoral robes acquired with an honorary degree from St Andrews University, was to take part in many other of the suffrage processions in the next few years, for instance, marching in a NUWSS procession from the Embankment to the Albert Hall on 13 June 1908 and in 1913, by now 70 years old, taking a very active part in the NUWSS's greatest spectacular, walking with the East Anglian 'pilgrims' on the 'Pilgrimage' that brought thousands of suffragists from all parts of the country to a demonstration in Hyde Park on 26 July.

During the difficult years before the First World War Millicent Fawcett noted that her touchstone was a saying employed by Henry Fawcett when dealing with the Irish Question in the 1880s – 'Just keep on and do what is right' and added 'I am far from claiming that we actually accomplished the difficult feat of doing what is right, but I believe we tried to'.³¹ In order to 'do what is right' she was able to



FIGURE 1.1 Millicent Garrett Fawcett, wearing a pendant presented to her by the NUWSS, photographed in 1913 by Lena Connell (Courtesy of the Women's Library@LSE)

bring an adaptable mind, a politician's brain, both to NUWSS policies and to changing conditions. Millicent matched Mrs Pankhurst in the number and variety of her speaking engagements, roving the country, providing the constitutional movement with a strong moral authority, always certain to attract a good audience and put heart into the local suffrage workers. She may not have had the charisma of Emmeline or Christabel Pankhurst, but she had a flair for conciliation, spiced with a dry wit. One campaigner, Maud Arncliffe-Sennett, who had sampled life as both a constitutionalist and a militant, described Millicent Fawcett as 'all brains but utterly without heart'.³² Millicent was a political leader and could afford to leave the histrionics to others; 'brains' certainly did not come amiss. The impressive development of the NUWSS as a political machine between 1907 and 1914 is a tribute to her success. The NUWSS was extremely well managed so that by 1913 its 500-plus local societies were incorporated into a federated structure, with branches in most localities, from Orkney in the north to Falmouth in the south.

In October 1909, as WSPU violence was increasing in degree and nature, Millicent wrote to Helena Dowson of Nottingham NUWSS, 'I do not agree with those of your members who say that the recent outbreaks of almost criminal violence on the part of the WSPU are accidental or are caused by some of the more excitable members getting out of hand. One cannot read "VfW" [*Votes for Women*, the WSPU paper] & the speeches of the Leaders and think that this is so. The violence is definitely premeditated and the worst of a policy of revolutionary violence is that it is bound to go on and become more and more violent. It was so both during the French Revolution and in Ireland in the eighties. I believe that events will show that this is the case ... I believe with you that as the WSPU proceed from violence to greater violence and probably to serious crime, their former adherents will in considerable numbers drop off and leave them, many are already quietly doing so. The really essential point for the National Union is to make it clear that we stand for peaceful persuasion and for moral force only'.³³ She was proved right and many women were drawn to the suffrage movement by the publicity created by the WSPU, but, nevertheless, joined the NUWSS, feeling unable to condone breaking the law.

Millicent's tactical adaptability was put to the test in 1912 when it became clear that, rather than standing apart from party politics, it would be better for the NUWSS to work with the Labour party, the only party prepared to oppose any franchise bill in which women were not included. Although a life-long Liberal, Millicent became a member of the Election Fighting Fund (EFF) Committee, through which the NUWSS backed Labour party candidates at by-elections. The idea was that by doing so Liberal candidates would be subjected to greater opposition than if they only had to contend with Conservative candidates. It was agreed, however, that Liberal party candidates who had consistently supported women's enfranchisement would not be opposed. By this strategy it was also hoped that pressure would be put on the Liberal party to de-select anti-suffragist candidates. The NUWSS expected that the EFF policy would be fully put to the test in the next general election, due to be held in 1915; in the event, of course, war intervened. The policy of supporting the Labour party, allowing the suffrage movement to cross class barriers, was very much in accord with the theory that Millicent Fawcett had always espoused, that it would be a general democratisation that would lead to women's enfranchisement. Emily Davies, a staunch Conservative, felt unable to accept the EFF policy and resigned from the NUWSS. There was also considerable opposition to it from Liberal members of the NUWSS, but Millicent Fawcett managed to keep the policy intact until it lapsed under the new political conditions brought by the outbreak of war.

However, despite the crescendo of violence from the militants and the steady politicking of the constitutionalists, the vote was not yet within women's grasp when war was declared on 4 August 1914. As leader of the NUWSS Millicent spent all that day in a committee meeting, 'trying to devise plans for keeping our organization in being – notwithstanding what we felt in the event of war to be absolutely necessary – the entire suspension of our political work'.³⁴ Over the next

couple of days the NUWSS consulted its hundreds of local societies and the consensus was that ‘we should use our organization and our money-raising powers for the relief of distress caused by the dislocation of business brought about by the war’.³⁵ In her editorial in the 7 August edition of the NUWSS paper, *Common Cause*, Millicent wrote ‘Let us show ourselves worthy of citizenship, whether our claim to it be recognized or not’.³⁶

However, quite separate from the war relief work entered into with gusto by NUWSS societies and members, in early 1915 there occurred what Millicent later referred to as ‘the only part of my work for Suffrage which I wish to forget’.³⁷ Indeed as Ray Strachey remarked, ‘In later years she was most unwilling to refer to these troubles, and she gave them no place either in her published account of the movement or in her own reminiscences’.³⁸ For a schism had opened up in the NUWSS’s executive committee, with the majority of its members increasingly questioning whether Britain should continue to play a part in the war, while Millicent remained devotedly patriotic in its support. The result was that all the officers of the NUWSS, except Mrs Fawcett and the treasurer, resigned, along with ten members of the executive committee. Although those who supported the anti-war movement were in the majority on the committee there was no attempt to oust Millicent Fawcett from her presidency, for she represented the majority view in the suffrage movement and, indeed, in the country. But it had taken all her skill as a politician to prevent the NUWSS imploding and was now divided politically and emotionally from the women who had been her closest colleagues. It was a bitter period; it says something for the generosity of spirit on both sides that many friendships did survive.

Millicent was very matter-of-fact as to the reasons that eventually led the government to grant women a measure of partial enfranchisement in 1918, writing, after the vote had been won, ‘it is impossible to disguise the fact that we in England won our battle at the exact moment we did in consequence of the absolute necessity under which the Government laboured of producing a new parliamentary register and a new voting qualification for men. For this meant that a real reform of the representation of the people was required; and the previous stages of our political struggle had demonstrated that when once the franchise question was dealt with by Parliament it would be impossible any longer to neglect the claims of women’.³⁹ The voting register was out of date and most men who had been involved in fighting and away from home could not fulfil the ‘occupier’ qualification. In addition, the introduction of compulsory military service for men had strengthened the demand for manhood suffrage; no man could be expected to fight for a country in which he did not have a vote. An Electoral Reform Conference was appointed in October 1916 and matters finally resolved themselves once Asquith had been removed as prime minister in December 1916 and replaced by Lloyd George, who, although by no means a reliable friend of women’s suffrage, at least was not entirely unsympathetic and now found it politic to take notice of the women’s campaign.

In March 1917 it was Millicent Fawcett who led a deputation to Lloyd George that included representatives of many women’s suffrage societies. Realizing full

well that politics is the art of the possible, she emphasised to the prime minister that if the women's suffrage clause in any proposed bill was to have government backing, 'we greatly preferred an imperfect Bill which could pass to the most perfect measure in the world which could not'.⁴⁰ Lloyd George assured the deputation of his sympathy with their demands. Although there were years of disappointment to make suffragists wary of such a claim, a couple of months later they were able to take strength from a good omen when Parliament voted to remove the grille that caged women in the Ladies' Gallery. Then, when the Women's Suffrage Clause was debated in the House, it became clear that, for the very first time, such a measure did indeed have government support.

During these months Millicent, as political leader of the suffrage movement, lobbied every member of the government and, on 10 January 1918, had the satisfaction of witnessing the debate that resulted in a majority for the women's suffrage clause to the Representation of the People Bill. By this, women whose names appeared on the local government register and were over the age of 30 were given the parliamentary vote. In her conduct of the constitutional suffrage campaign Millicent Fawcett was above all calm and diplomatic. As Ray Strachey wrote, 'Her task was to provide convenient ladders down which opponents might climb, and to help them to save their faces while they changed their minds'.⁴¹

Millicent Fawcett retired from the presidency of the NUWSS in 1919 when it became the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship, and in 1925 was created a dame of the British Empire. The previous year she had been the guest of honour at a party celebrating her contribution to the women's movement, a party that with a certain appropriateness was held in the garden of Aubrey House where, all those years before, her life's great adventure had begun.

In his character sketch of Millicent Fawcett her cousin Edmund Garrett had written, 'among the advocates of women's suffrage, and all that is implied in that movement, Mrs F has always been the leader of the strictly reasonable section – the section which has set itself to conciliate natural prejudice quite as much as to rally the enthusiasm of the faithful. More even than by her writings or her speeches, she has helped the cause by her influence, her tone, her personality. The impression which she has made upon public men who have come in contact with her has been, perhaps, her most valuable service to it. She is, above everything, "sensible"... She has indeed unbounded contempt for the way in which Liberals have shilly-shallied and played double on a question which she rightly considers to involve the root principles of Liberalism. But she is all for what she deems legitimate compromise'.⁴² Ray Strachey complained that, as Millicent Fawcett's first biographer, her task was made difficult because her subject's personality was one of 'quiet conviction' and 'unshaken reasonableness', characteristics that did not make for exciting reading. I would, however, contend that these were exactly the qualities that led, at last, to the political enfranchisement of women.⁴³ 'Quiet conviction' and 'unshaken reasonableness' may not, unlike 'militancy', create headlines, yet, apart from her successful leadership of the campaign that finally gave a first tranche of women the parliamentary vote, Millicent Fawcett's career as

a politician has left another very real legacy. For, 150 years after she gave her first public speech advocating the cause of parliamentary suffrage, the Fawcett Society, in Millicent's name, continues the campaign for women's rights.

Notes

- 1 Ray Strachey, *Millicent Garrett Fawcett* (London: John Murray, 1931), 21.
- 2 Diary of Lady Maude Parry, September 22, 1887, Shulbrede Priory (private collection).
- 3 Elizabeth Garrett to Harriet Cook, April 12, 1864. Suffolk Archives, Ipswich branch, HA436.
- 4 Moses Coit Tyler, *Glimpses of England* (London: G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1898), 17.
- 5 John Stuart Mill, *Considerations of Representative Government*, 2nd ed. (London: Longmans, Green, 1865), 184.
- 6 Emily Davies was, in 1869, to be the founder of Girton, the first college for women in Cambridge.
- 7 The photograph is held in Women's Library@LSE (TWL/2004/10), accessed November 19, 2019, It is viewable online in TWL Flickr Collection <https://www.flickr.com/photos/lselibrary/22159137393/in/album-72157660822880401/>.
- 8 Millicent Garrett Fawcett, *What I Remember*, 2nd imp. (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1925), 57.
- 9 See BL, Gladstone Papers Vol LXXI Add Mss 44,156; BL, Macmillan Archive Add Mss 55206. For instance, at the end of a letter from Henry to Alexander Macmillan, dated 20 March 1872 (folio 6), written from the Fawcetts' London home (42 Bessborough Gardens) Millicent absent-mindedly began signing her own name, before correcting to that of Henry.
- 10 George A. Macmillan, ed, *Letters of Alexander Macmillan* (Glasgow: Robert Maclehose, 1908), 240.
- 11 Henry Fawcett, preface to Henry Fawcett and Millicent Garrett Fawcett, *Essays and Lectures on Social and Political Subjects* (London: Macmillan, London, 1872), vi.
- 12 See, for instance, BL, Macmillan Archive Add Mss 55206, folios 3–4, 5–6, 102–3, 107–8.
- 13 Mary Bennett, Vol. 2 of *Ford Madox Brown: A Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press for Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2010), 398.
- 14 "Henry Fawcett, Esq., MP, and Mrs Fawcett" by Ford Madox Brown, 1872, National Portrait Gallery, London. By the late 1880s, some years after Henry's death, the sexual scandal surrounding Dilke had induced Millicent to repudiate any lingering friendship. Despite this breach the portrait remained in Dilke's possession until 1911 when, under the terms of his will, it was bequeathed to the NPG. In her biography of Henry Fawcett, Winifred Holt commented that at that time of writing this was the "only portrait of a living woman, not of royal blood, in that historic collection" (London: Constable & Co, 1915, 137). For a very interesting but slightly different interpretation of the photograph of the Fawcetts and of the Madox Brown portrait see Colleen Denney, *Women, Portraiture and the Crisis of Identity in Victorian England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 133–40.
- 15 Fawcett, *Political Economy for Beginners* (London and Cambridge: Macmillan, 1870).
- 16 Francis E. Mineka and Dwight N. Lindley, eds, vol XVII of *The Later Letters of John Stuart Mill* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), 1665.
- 17 Macmillan, ed, *Letters*, 260.
- 18 Millicent Fawcett, Foreword to Millicent Garrett Fawcett, *Tales in Political Economy* (London: Macmillan, 1874).
- 19 Mrs Henry Fawcett, introduction to Honnor Morten, *Questions for Women and Men* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1899), 4–5.

- 20 Fawcett, *What I Remember*, 87.
- 21 Letter from J.S. Mill to Mrs Taylor, October 7, 1869, Mineka and Lindsey, eds, vol. XVII of *Later Letters*, 1648–49.
- 22 *Punch* (London) April 16, 1870, 155.
- 23 Millicent Garrett Fawcett, “Electoral Disabilities of Women,” 11 March 1871, as given at the New Hall, Tavistock’, reprinted in Jane Lewis, ed., *Before the Vote Was Won* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), 100–17.
- 24 Helen Blackburn, *Women’s Suffrage: A Record of the Women’s Suffrage Movement in the British Isles* (London and Oxford: Williams & Norgate, 1902), 109, 110.
- 25 *The Day’s Doings* (London), May 18, 1872, 203.
- 26 *Women’s Suffrage Journal*, May 1, 1882, 72.
- 27 See Papers of Millicent Garrett Fawcett in the Manchester Central Library and in the Women’s Library@LSE.
- 28 Edmund Garrett, *Review of Reviews*, July 1890, 21 and 22.
- 29 *The Times*, July 7, 1894, 12.
- 30 Lady Frances Balfour, Vol.2 of *Ne Obliviscaris: Dinna Forget* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1925), 169.
- 31 Strachey, *Millicent Garrett Fawcett*, 212.
- 32 Arncliffe-Sennett Collection, VIII, 1909 (British Library), quoted in Brian Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 28.
- 33 Letter from MGF to Helena Dowson, October 15, 1909. Women’s Suffrage Collection: Papers of Millicent Fawcett, Microfilm, Reel 14. (Marlborough: Adam Matthew, 1995).
- 34 Fawcett, *What I Remember*, 217.
- 35 Fawcett, *What I Remember*, 218.
- 36 *Common Cause*, August 7, 1914, 376.
- 37 Millicent Fawcett to Catherine Marshall, February 18, 1918. Cumbria Record Office (D/Mar/3/52) quoted in D. Rubinstein, *A Different World for Women: The Life of Millicent Garrett Fawcett* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 216.
- 38 Strachey, *Millicent Garrett Fawcett*, 285.
- 39 Millicent Garrett Fawcett, *The Women’s Victory – And After: Personal Reminiscences, 1911–18* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1920), 121.
- 40 Fawcett, *Women’s Victory*, 146.
- 41 Strachey, *Millicent Garrett Fawcett*, 304.
- 42 Garrett, *Review of Reviews*, 20–21.
- 43 Strachey, *Millicent Garrett Fawcett*, vii.

SOJOURNER TRUTH, CHARACTER, AND CONTEXT

On the morning of June 1, 1843 in New York City, Isabella Van Wagenen, the black house servant of Lucy Whiting, stunned her employer of over 10 years when she announced that she was quitting immediately—that very afternoon. The servant's unlikely explanation for her abrupt departure was that "the Spirit" called her; she was "going East." In all likelihood, since her emancipation from slavery 20 years earlier, Isabella Van Wagenen had worked as a housekeeper in the homes of a number of New York City middle-class white merchants. To many of them, and not just to Lucy Whiting, Isabella's declaration might have seemed an act of lunacy. The 46-year-old black woman had first been a "good slave," and then a model domestic employee. Her abrupt decision probably seemed impetuous to Lucy Whiting. Lucy knew quite well that Isabella had no financial resources, no pension or property, and no family to support her. Furthermore, at the age of 46, Isabella was old, and nearing the likely end of her productive years; it hardly seemed like an opportune moment in life to be traipsing off on a whim into an uncertain future.

Formerly enslaved people like Isabella could not retire. Most former slaves had to work until the ends of their lives, just to stave off famine and protracted suffering before a painful death. Such an excruciatingly attenuated death had been the fate of Isabella's own enslaved father many years earlier. "This faithful slave," Isabella would later say, "this deserted wreck of humanity, was found on his miserable pallet, frozen and stiff in death. . . . He had died, chilled and starved, with no one to speak a kindly word, or do a kindly deed for him, in that last dread hour of need!"¹ With the reckless declaration that she was "going East," Isabella's sudden departure

must have seemed all the more dramatic to Lucy Whiting since the servant appeared to lack any employable skills beyond housekeeping. How would Isabella survive? She had never learned a trade, nor experienced full independence. Isabella was born and remained enslaved until age 25. After her emancipation, she spent another 20 years working as a domestic servant, living under someone else's roof and someone else's direction. She had no formal education. She could not even write her name.²

Isabella's only education came mostly from her experiences of profound oppression: slavery, discrimination, poverty, and exploitation. Subject to the will of her white masters, she had been forcibly separated from the protective presence of her parents at the vulnerable age of nine. She bore the physical and mental scars of her white masters and mistresses' abuse. The 10-year-old Isabella had been whipped until blood streamed freely down her back. For the rest of her life, a meshwork of raised scars would cover her back. As a young woman, she had been prohibited from seeing the enslaved man whom she loved. A broken heart was the unseen punishment Isabella suffered for her affair, but she was better treated than her enslaved lover who was whipped nearly to the point of death by his enraged master. In that physically, mentally, and emotionally brutal environment, Isabella was forced to marry an older slave whom she did not love. Over the years, she suffered the deaths of two of her five children (one as an infant and the other as an adult). These painful experiences only punctuated a life that at best was grinding, exhausting, and utterly dehumanizing. She raised four children while she attended to her daily labor. On the farm, Isabella rose early in the morning to attend to the kitchen, then joined the laborers in the field or threshing room. She went directly from the fields back to the kitchen for her evening housework.

In the evening of that June day in 1843, when the presumably still-flabbergasted Lucy Whiting sat down to dinner with her husband Perez, she told him about the events of the day and Isabella's departure. Perez did not seem to be as astonished by the news. Despite Isabella's age, sex, race, and personal history, Perez Whiting saw in the tall, muscular black woman a strong-willed, resourceful, independent, and deeply spiritual person. Isabella was already a religious leader in the City, and had recently acquired quite a following as an independent preaching woman. Perez, like a number of other liberal Methodist Perfectionists, looked up to Isabella as a gifted mystic. Perez had known Isabella for many years; he believed that Isabella had a special ability to communicate with and directly experience God. Isabella's claim to be following the call of the Spirit did not strike Perez as weird or insane.

Even Isabella's sudden departure made sense to Perez; he had witnessed how her religious impulses could be precipitous. A few years earlier, Isabella

had left New York City to join a religious commune run by a man who referred to himself as the “Prophet Matthias.” Isabella lived for nearly two years among Matthias’ followers in the religious sect known as the Kingdom of Zion. Although the Whitings had not fallen under the influence of Matthias, they circulated in the same Perfectionist social circles to which Matthias’ one-time followers and financial backers later returned. Isabella worked for the Whitings before and after joining the Kingdom. Even after Isabella’s return to New York City, she remained religiously adventurous and interested in new prophets. In the weeks before her ultimate departure from New York, she had begun preaching at her local African Methodist church, where, from time to time, the black minister permitted women to take the pulpit. She was acquiring a reputation among local black and white Methodists as a religious and spiritual leader. On that June day in 1843, with only 25 cents in her pocket and the clothes on her back, Isabella struck out under a new name. Until that day, her new identity only had form in her imagination. She would live 40 years longer as Sojourner Truth, until her death at the advanced age of 86.

In the four decades after she left New York City, Sojourner Truth’s mission to preach the gospel evolved into a mission to abolish slavery, bring about women’s suffrage, and contribute to the racial uplift of blacks. She preached her mission with what Cornel West would later describe as “black prophetic fire . . . a hypersensitivity to suffering that generates a righteous indignation that results in the willingness to live and die for freedom.”³ Her lectures and travels would be glowingly detailed in hundreds of newspapers across the country; she would become a household name, and a cherished national icon. She supervised the writing of her personal memoir, *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth: A Bondswoman of Olden Time*, a book she sold by the thousands to support her activism. Before the Civil War, she tirelessly travelled the country, and powerfully advocated for the freedom and equality of women and blacks. Sojourner Truth, the celebrity activist, met with two Presidents, became a leader in the abolition and women’s suffrage movements, served as the inspiration for writers and artists, and acquired national fame.⁴ With her fellow activists, she helped shift public opinion in support of the abolitionist movement.

After the Civil War, Sojourner Truth continued her work to end racial injustice. In Arlington, Virginia and Washington D.C., she sought to improve the economic and living conditions for the formerly enslaved refugees who were living there. She took on the district’s streetcar service, protesting its policy of refusing to pick up black passengers. Sojourner, then well into her 60s, bravely endured physical violence as conductors tried to wrestle her off the streetcars.⁵ In her 70s, she petitioned Congress (albeit unsuccessfully) to grant land in Kansas as a new home for emancipated former

slaves. In this second half of her life, she was beloved by her many friends, black and white, male and female. She corresponded extensively with them for years through letters dictated to scribes. At her rallies, she drew crowds numbering in the thousands, speaking with moving, insightful, and often witty rhetoric in support of her cherished causes. Her death made national headlines, and her funeral was attended by 1,000 friends and onlookers—a stark contrast to her father’s unrecognized and solitary end.

Isabella’s life as Sojourner Truth began on that June day of 1843 when the 46-year-old strode forth confidently with her newly-assumed identity. Sojourner had selected this name for herself. Today, few people recognize the name that she left behind: Isabella Van Wagenen. Sojourner Truth’s important role in nineteenth century activism is overlooked by many history books and chroniclers of the era. Her story is eclipsed by those of Frederick Douglass, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Harriet Jacobs. Her accomplishments and exploits are frequently confused with those of Harriet Tubman, an Underground Railroad conductor who was a Southerner and Sojourner’s junior by 20 years. To many Americans today, Sojourner’s fame and list of achievements now seem remote and hazy. By comparison to the collected works, biographies and legends of these other abolitionists, Sojourner Truth has received relatively little attention from historians and American folklorists. She never learned to read or write, so she did not, apparently, author any written works. Although hundreds of newspaper articles were written about her, they were written in an era when newspapers openly espoused a political point of view. Abolitionist papers, like Garrison’s own *Liberator*, only published stories that cast abolitionists in the most favorable light. Anti-abolition papers wrote stories which disparaged and discredited abolitionists. Both sides tried to agitate and frighten their respective opponents. Beyond that, newspaper reporters openly embellished stories, wrote from a partisan perspective, and usually thought of themselves more as entertainment or rumor mills than as objective news recorders. The best source for a history of Sojourner Truth’s life would seem to be the *Narrative*, a book that is partly a biography, partly an autobiography, and partly a polemical tract. Given this heterogeneity, the *Narrative* seems not to meet the basic criteria of a historically reliable primary source. In order to fully rely on a primary source, the historian must be able to identify the author, the date of writing, and the purpose for writing the document.

The first edition’s named author, Olive Gilbert, is quite obscure, and she was succeeded by Sojourner’s friend, Frances Titus, as the author of the second and third editions. Though unnamed, Sojourner herself clearly seems to have told the story of her youth. The famed abolitionist, William Lloyd Garrison, introduced Gilbert and Truth, and suggested that Olive act as amanuensis, or ghost-writer, for the illiterate Sojourner. Garrison had already sponsored

the writing of a number of slave narratives, which, in the 1840s and 50s proved to be immensely beneficial in generating support for the abolition movement. Sojourner's *Narrative* became so popular that two subsequent editions, updated and edited by her friend Frances Titus, were published in 1875 and 1884 respectively, and all sold out.⁶ The little pamphlet was written to further and sustain Sojourner's activism, and not purely for the purpose of recording her life. The same could be said, however, for the *Autobiography of Frederick Douglass*.⁷ Unlike Sojourner, Frederick Douglass was the author of his own autobiography, while the illiterate Sojourner penned the *Narrative* with the assistance of a younger, white abolitionist, Olive Gilbert. Because the *Narrative* is considered polemical literature, contained some historical errors, and undoubtedly incorporated the perspective of her ghostwriter, historians have chipped away at the reliability of the *Narrative*.

The authenticity and accuracy of the transcript of Sojourner Truth's best known and iconic speech—"Ar'n't I a Woman?"—has been questioned, further diminishing her legacy. The speech, as remembered years later by the woman's suffragist Frances Gage, was reprinted in Frances Titus' 1875 edition of the *Narrative*, and has appeared in many history textbooks.⁸ The speech was widely considered to be the quintessential expression of the mythic Sojourner, until one of Sojourner's biographers, the historian Carleton Mabee, presented a convincing argument that Sojourner had never said these words. Mabee pointed out that the speech was written down years after it was delivered, and contained a number of errors of fact. He dismissively wrote of the speech:

Unless evidence to the contrary turns up, we have to regard Gage's account of Truth's asking the "Ar'n't I a Woman?" question as folklore, like the story of George Washington and the cherry tree. It may be suitable for telling to children, but not for serious understanding of Sojourner Truth and her times.⁹

For over a century after her death, the "Ar'n't I a Woman?" speech remained at the core of the cherished popular image of the articulate, thoughtful, defiant and indomitable Sojourner Truth. In it, she purportedly boasted of "man like" strength; she challenged conventional Christianity by rereading the Bible to assert the rights of women; she displayed the skill of a seasoned orator. The speech painted a beloved image of an unlikely heroine. Mabee's analysis threatened to sweep this all away, even though thousands of newspaper articles attested to her popularity as a speaker, her influence on her contemporaries, and her reach upward into the highest ranks of society and government. All had been devalued as historically reliable sources. The line between fact and myth became blurred. Ironically, Mabee was not striving to erase the memory of Sojourner Truth, but only to "correct the

record.” Yet, his critique of the authenticity of the speech has had a more significant detrimental effect on the public memory of Sojourner Truth than did his otherwise laudatory portrayal of her life.

The challenge to any biographer of Sojourner, then, is to excavate the true Sojourner from this tangle of fact and myth. How do we account for Sojourner’s rocket-like ascent to national prominence in the antebellum era? Two modern black female historians—Nell Irvin Painter and Margaret Washington—have written excellent biographies based on painstaking research and crosschecking of sources. These biographies and the work of other historians committed to careful identification of the faintly heard voices and inadequately-remembered deeds of African Americans have succeeded in saving the memory of Sojourner Truth.¹⁰

A SINGULAR NAME FOR A SINGULAR WOMAN

On the day of her departure from New York City, although Lucy and Perez Whiting reacted to the news of Isabella’s mission in different ways, neither commented on the singular name that their former servant had chosen for herself. And yet, her act of creating a new identity for herself is an important autobiographical statement. She alone selected the words—Sojourner and Truth—for her name, and with them she declared her identity. The act of re-naming herself was a radical break from her earlier life as a servant and enslaved person. In that earlier life, her changing names marked the number of times this human being was legally transferred as the chattel (personal property) of one slave master to another. Each name change signaled not just a legal status change, but also a dramatic upheaval in all aspects of her life. Her residence and living conditions, the rules for and consequences of her actions, the dominant language of her environment, her work responsibilities, and the people and family who surrounded her, all changed at least five times before she reached the age of 46. Born Isabella Bomefree, she then became Isabella Nealy, Isabella Scriver, Isabella Dumont, and finally, Isabella Van Wagenen. Sojourner’s selection of her own name signified that her enslavement and subservience was literally and metaphorically at an end. From then on, she intended to be the master of her own destiny. The name was remarkable, even in the nineteenth century, when neither the word “Sojourner” nor the word “Truth” were conventionally used as names. What these words meant to Sojourner, how they expressed her intent for the future, and what she thought they might mean to the people whom she would meet all figure prominently in the historical reconstruction of the woman.

Then, as now, the word “Sojourner” evoked a distinctively Biblical, Christian and missionary ideal.¹¹ In the King James Version of the Bible, the most

widely used version at the time, the word “Sojourner” appeared repeatedly to refer to any traveler or foreigner.¹² The *Narrative* describes how, at the moment of selecting this name, Sojourner intended to go forward spreading the word of Jesus through itinerant preaching. Harriet Beecher Stowe’s roughly contemporaneous account of Sojourner echoed this understanding of the word. According to Stowe, the activist said that she had chosen the name, “Sojourner . . . because I was to travel up an’ down the land, showin’ the people their sins, an’ bein’ a sign unto them.” Stowe continued, “afterwards I [Sojourner Truth] told the Lord I wanted another name, ’cause everybody else had two names; and the Lord gave me Truth, because I was to declare the truth to the people.”¹³ Even though Stowe’s story was inaccurate in important respects: she depicted an African Sojourner who spoke simply, and with a Southern accent. The historical Sojourner was a quick-witted northerner who spoke with a Dutch accent. Stowe’s account probably accurately reflected how the name was popularly understood at the time. With the choice of the word “Sojourner” on that day in 1843, we can conclude that Isabella was declaring her intent to take up the life of a traveler, and to preach in the liberating name of Jesus during her remaining years.

Sojourner’s second name, “Truth,” also possessed religious, though not biblical, significance for this aspiring preacher. It is a weighty name, the kind of name that said this person thought that she believed she had access to the T-R-U-T-H, for her, the word of God. She had seen other religious leaders use their names to underscore that they regarded themselves as prophets. Matthias, the leader of the Kingdom of Zion, the religious sect to which Sojourner briefly belonged, described himself as a prophet and the “Spirit of Truth.”¹⁴ His followers called him “Prophet Matthias.” So too, another of Sojourner’s former employers, Elijah Pierson, had instructed his friends and Sojourner, to call him “Prophet Elijah the Tishbite.” He claimed that the name had been revealed to him when he heard a booming voice in the air while his wife lay dying.¹⁵ Sojourner knew well, and had been influenced by, both men. It seems reasonable to conclude that she named herself “Truth” for the same reasons that they had chosen their names: to establish her claim to be a prophet.

On the day Sojourner Truth first strode forth, she set a new path for the future with a name that identified her as an itinerant prophet. The new name marked a turning point in her life; it served as the outward expression of how she understood herself. The act of giving herself a new name could best be likened to a religious rite of passage, a ritual event that marks a transition from one period of life to another. She was not attempting to escape her past; even though she would never return to her circle of friends and employers, or her community in New York City. Never again would she be a slave or even work as a servant. She had reached a point of

spiritual maturity that propelled her to go forward in a different way, yet she retained many traits of the character that had been forged in an earlier era when she was known as Isabella. In her Dutch home environment she was industrious and hardworking. She carefully observed how to be an organizer, a household manager and leader, and she learned to live and function in a close, interracial environment. As a newly emancipated adult, she boldly filed a complaint in the New York State courts in order to contest the illegal sale of her young son into slavery. She eventually migrated to New York City, where she resourcefully found employment in order to support herself and her son. She later extricated herself from a religious cult that had collapsed amid scandal and rumor. Again she unashamedly returned to court to salvage her reputation by suing for libel. She established a network of influential contacts, both in her home county and then in New York City.

The same resilience, bravery, determination, and genial manner that enabled her to survive enslavement and adversity would catapult her to national fame. From this base, as an adult in her 30s, her intellectual, religious and social abilities would continue to develop. When she wandered east and north from New York, preaching and meeting new people, Sojourner honed her story-telling skills to great effect. She charmed audiences (and even tamed a rowdy mob) with her rich contralto singing and folk wisdom. The shaping of the raw material of her character, begun in the time of her enslavement, kept developing though her years in New York as an emancipated person, and continued to take form as she matured into a powerful advocate for abolition and women's rights. The iconic Sojourner Truth was only fully formed after she had lived for several years in Massachusetts among the abolitionists and social reformers of the Northampton Association for Education and Industry, whose causes she would embrace as her own. There she met William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass, David Ruggles and other abolitionists. There, she formed lasting ties with leaders in the women's suffrage movement, and reached her full maturity around the age of 50, when she published the *Narrative*, and began her career as a public speaker. Even in old age, in the post-Civil War years, with her mission of abolition accomplished, she continued speaking out for women's suffrage, and took up a new cause—racial uplift and civil rights.

The rest of this chapter will briefly analyze the wellspring of her character and the context of the times, before recounting the life of the woman now remembered as Sojourner Truth. The rest of this biography is divided into four eras: the two "Isabella" periods—of her enslavement and her emancipation—and the two "Sojourner" periods—as itinerant preacher and social justice activist, and as an elder stateswoman. Each era is marked not only by different names, but also by a dominant physical and geographic location. She was a slave in Ulster County, New York, an emancipated servant in New York

City, a budding social justice activist in Massachusetts and Ohio, and, as of 1857, and for the rest of her life, a resident of Michigan, who continued her activism in Washington, D.C. and on the Western Frontier. Her domicile changed, her religious affiliations changed, and even the nature of her activism shifted slightly—but her inspired commitment to justice remained constant.

ROOTS OF HER CHARACTER

In all these places, through all of these changes and in all of these times, two core aspects of Sojourner's character underlie her confident rise out of slavery into freedom: her spirituality, and her exercise of religious freedom. These were, respectively, the flowing wellspring for her identity and confidence, and the seedbed for her practice of freedom. While these terms, at first blush, may seem similar, they have distinctively different meanings. In casual conversation, spirituality and the free exercise of religion are sometimes subsumed under the term "religion." However, when used that way, the term "religion" obscures an important distinction between inwardly directed individual spirituality and externally visible practice relating to an institution or group.

Sojourner's unique internal spirituality was her mysticism. She believed she was in direct communication with, and in the constant presence of, God. Unlike the constricting slave mentality of her bondage, a mentality from which she was not fully released until many years after her *de facto* emancipation, her inner spirituality was spontaneous, generative, and independent of outside constraint. Mysticism is based in a strong belief in God's ongoing presence before the mystic. Mystics often point to particular experiences of God, as Sojourner would with her vision, but Sojourner also believed that she participated in an ongoing relationship with God. Bernard McGinn, an eminent scholar of Christian mysticism, writes: "Mysticism [is] that element of Christian belief or practice that concerns the preparation for, the consciousness of, and the effect of what mystics themselves have described as the direct and transformative presence of God."¹⁶ As McGinn describes it, therefore, preparation and transformation are the two necessary steps in the development of the mystic. In Sojourner's case, she prepared for God's presence through prayer, song, and devotions, and she manifested her transformation through her efforts to achieve justice for her fellows in humanity, for Sojourner's sense of justice was woven into her conception of God.

Interiorly, from an early age, Sojourner believed that she spoke to God, and God spoke to her. This spiritual certainty infused her with a sense of authority, security, and confidence. Her conversations with God were

direct, and unmediated by other human actors; they buoyed her to surmount personal hardship, guided her through social dangers, and fueled her passion for justice. Her confidence in her direct relationship to God was dramatically affirmed by a vision at the time of her emancipation. As a mature woman she would often say of herself, simply, “I talks to God, and God talks to me.”¹⁷

The second aspect of Sojourner’s character was the manner in which she first lived out and experienced freedom through her exercise of religious freedom. As analytic categories, the term “religious” and “religion” refer to external or outwardly identifiable practices or beliefs, shared by a community of people who identify themselves as coreligionists. Religious affiliation is the occasion for meeting in groups, speaking out to establish common beliefs and principles within a community, and sometimes, even, recognizing the authority of a chosen person as the leader of that community. Every time that Sojourner changed or adopted a religious affiliation, not only did she realign herself to new beliefs and practices, she exercised all of these aspects of her religious freedom. The right to religious freedom is a civil liberty, legally recognized for white American men long before Isabella was born. The right to change religions is at the core of that freedom, and has been recognized internationally as a universal human right.

Outwardly, Isabella, who would later be known as Sojourner, was a religious adventurer and experimenter. As a child, neither Isabella nor her parents were affiliated with any formal religion. Although her parents were nominally Dutch-Reformed and may even have attended church a few times to obey their masters the Hardenberghs, they belonged to no church. There is no evidence that the young Isabella ever attended any religious services, nor that she identified with any single religious tradition. As a slave, Isabella was deprived of religious and every other freedom. In 1826, the newly manumitted Isabella immediately exercised her freedom by joining a church. This exercise of religious freedom was an essential component in Isabella’s transition toward full emancipation; it was a bold affirmation of her dignity as a person. From a human rights perspective, then, Sojourner was a pioneer in human rights practice. She ventured broadly and fearlessly in her sampling of different religions, but this was not due to indecision or frivolity. Precisely because her inner spiritual certainty drove her connection to religion, she felt free to try a number of religious denominations and sects. As a newly emancipated free woman, Isabella first joined a Methodist church in Kingstown, New York, and began attending religious revival meetings in the area. Over the years, she sampled and sometimes even joined an extraordinary number of different religions: Quakers, Methodists (Perfectionists, and the holiness movement in the African Methodist Episcopal Church of Zion), the Kingdom of Zion, Millerites, Adventists, and

Spiritualists. She changed her formal religious affiliation many times during her life; ultimately, she declared herself to be a religious independent and “Come-Outer.” She affiliated herself with a number of different traditions, most of them, Christian. Even today, most people are much more fixed in their religious identity. Most will acquire a religious identity through family heritage, and may change this affiliation only once or twice more in adulthood. Commonly, the formation of religious identity precedes the development of a distinct understanding of one’s individual spirituality. For Isabella the inverse was true—her mystical spirituality developed before she determined her religious identity. She did not happen upon her religion by accident or birth, instead, she sought out a religion that would conform to her mysticism.

Isabella’s mystical spirituality and her exercise of religious freedom alone, however, were not the sole reasons for her ascent to national fame in antebellum America; these traits enabled her rise in a world made temporarily dynamic and malleable by changing conceptions of race, religion, and rights. Her individual path mirrored the seismic social and political revisions of her day. In the decades that preceded the Civil War, previously accepted norms of religion, rights, and race were being challenged and radically rethought across the United States. Sojourner Truth, the black, formerly enslaved, prophetic social activist was in many ways an incarnation of these tumultuous transitions. She would become one of the nation’s foremost spokeswomen for change. When she spoke about change, and how it could improve lives, she described her own transformation.

SLAVERY IN THE NORTH

When Isabella was born in 1797, slavery had begun receding in the North. Immediately after the Revolutionary War, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Connecticut completely and summarily abolished it. In Pennsylvania, slaveholding withered away rapidly. In New Jersey, Rhode Island, and New York, the end came more gradually. New Jersey and New York were the largest slave states in the North. In New York City in 1790, even as the free black population grew, the enslaved black population remained stable and did not decline at all.¹⁸ Between 1790 and 1800 the number of slaves held in New York City actually increased by 22%, and the number of slaveholders increased by 33%.¹⁹ Even the New York manumission society admitted members who owned slaves. John Jay, a founding father and its most prominent spokesperson for the society, owned slaves and was himself a proponent of the steady and gradual end to slavery. New York State’s Emancipation Act of 1799 and other social and economic changes finally resulted in a diminution, apparent by 1810, in the number of slaveholders around

New York City. In Ulster County, however, where Isabella was born, slavery held on until its bitter end in New York in 1827.

The New York Dutch were infamous for their zealous and unrelenting slavery practices. In 1796, the visiting Frenchman La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, noted that slavery was as strictly maintained by the Dutch in New York as it was on the plantations in Virginia. A 1790 census revealed that 27.9% of the ethnic Dutch owned slaves, a much higher percentage than in any other ethnic group. Most of the slaves were employed in agriculture, and it was common for even a small farmer to own as many as seven slaves.²⁰ Slavery continued, virtually undiminished among the Dutch rural slave owners, until they were required by law in 1827 to release their adult slaves, and then to release the children of those slaves from slavery-like indentured servitude.²¹ As Isabella's *Narrative* attests, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, enslaved Africans in New York could still be bought and sold; husbands and wives could still be forcibly separated, and children could be sold away from their parents.

In 1799, the New York legislature took its initial step toward the gradual abolition of slavery. For those born into slavery after 1799, males would be liberated when they reached the age of 28, and females when they turned 25. The law did not affect Sojourner, then still known as Isabella, who was born in 1797. Not until more than a decade and a half later, in 1817, did the New York State Legislature pass a second gradual emancipation law that would free enslaved adults born before 1799 in 10 years, as of July 4, 1827. Despite the changing legislative climate, some enslaved people in the state of New York had to wait a decade before they were actually emancipated. In 1817, Sojourner was 20 years old; the law required her to wait until she reached the age of 30 to be emancipated. The children born during her enslavement would remain caught in a restrictive apprenticeship until their respective ages of emancipation. Gradual emancipation was not unique to New York: a similar process had been adopted in Pennsylvania and a number of other Northern states.

Although a huge step forward, gradual abolition afforded slave owners time to implement a whole new system of exploitation.²² Enslaved Africans, desperate for immediate freedom, were forced into an unequal bargaining position with slaveholders as they attempted to negotiate the terms for their liberation. Slave owners would offer long-term indentured service agreements in exchange for self-purchase or emancipation. Emotional ties to a particular region might also handicap emancipated slaves whose children might remain enslaved even after their parents were free. Mothers who wanted to watch over their children would often volunteer to continue their work in the capacity as they had while enslaved. Some slave owners illegally sent or sold young slaves to the South.

From 1810–1827 in the state of New York, rural and urban dwellers grew more polarized in their positions on slavery. As communities of free blacks grew, support for abolition also grew among some whites at the same time that white landowners nurtured an insatiable appetite for enslaved labor. Of these, the Dutch inhabitants of New York were among the most eager. In response to the demands of the rural landowning elites to preserve a passive and nonviolent slave labor force, restrictive laws were enacted in an attempt to discourage rebellion and flight among slaves, and limit the lure of opportunity for emancipated blacks. Not until 1830 did free blacks outnumber enslaved blacks still living in the rural parts of New York and New Jersey. Legal restrictions in the form of slave codes and poll taxes were used to shore up the institution of slavery in its dwindling years, and to enforce racial prejudice. By 1820, slavery in New York had been replaced with discriminatory laws and an economic system that was thoroughly entangled with the slave institutions of the South. The New York State constitution of 1821 granted voting rights to all adult male citizens, but specifically set a higher bar for blacks than for whites in terms of property ownership and residency.²³ Furthermore, a new institution had emerged—lifetime of apprenticeship—which ensnared many young black men working in the growing industrial economy.

Meanwhile, all over the East Coast, the number of free blacks soared, especially in cities like Boston, Philadelphia and New York. These communities were home to blacks emancipated by their northern owners, slaves escaped from the South, and refugees from the slave revolt in Haiti. Employment opportunities, especially for men, were slim. In many of the free black communities, females were in the majority. Even as an emancipated black person, therefore, life was still difficult. While the practice of slave holding receded in New York, the unseen shackles of discrimination and racial preferences cinched down on people of African descent living in all other parts of the North. A few voices of conscience called out to protest the changes but, overall, New York blacks in the town and the country increasingly found themselves trapped in cycles of poverty, voting restrictions, inadequate or nonexistent education, and grim employment prospects.

Most free blacks lived in relative poverty. Independent black merchants were at the top of the black income pyramid. These entrepreneurs primarily served the local community as small business owners: grocers, milliners, and newspaper owners. Yet they remained vulnerable to racially motivated vandalism, mob violence, and riots that could wipe out their business in a few hours. Black women often worked as poorly paid house servants. At the bottom of this pyramid were the paupers and prostitutes.²⁴

The end of slave holding in the North also did not end Northern racism, racial oppression, or support for the institution of slavery. Long after slavery

was abolished in the North and up until the Civil War, growing northern industrial economies throughout the 1830s remained complicit with, and dependent upon, slave labor for their vitality and ability to expand. Northern industrialists knowingly bought southern cotton for their textile mills, and southern iron for their railways. Furthermore, white working class immigrants in the North, especially those in white Irish Catholic gangs, who had themselves been targeted for religious and ethnic discrimination in the 1830s, saw the liberation of black slaves as a threat to their place in the blue collar work force. In Boston and New York mobs of rowdies disrupted antislavery meetings and opposed abolition.

THE ABOLITIONIST CAUSE

Beginning in the 1830s, these oppressions met with a rising chorus of demands for the abolition of slavery everywhere, racial uplift, and the recognition of equality for all. Over the course of the next 30 years, this cause became the central focus of public policy. Some of the most ardent abolitionists spoke out of their religious beliefs. In 1830, Quaker abolitionist Angelina Grimké, her Congregationalist minister husband Theodore Weld, and Protestant evangelical brothers Arthur and Lewis Tappan emerged as outspoken proponents of abolition. In 1833, the deeply religious Christian, William Lloyd Garrison, joined forces with Arthur Tappan to found the American Anti-Slavery Society, which would not only become the leading voice for abolition in the 1830s and 40s, but also would sponsor and coordinate numerous local and state antislavery societies.

Over the next 30 years, leading up to the Civil War, the abolitionists would refine and clarify their position. The Anti-Slavery Society argued that nonviolent tactics of moral persuasion would eventually bring change to America. Through speakers and rallies, they strove to persuade white Southerners and Northerners that slavery, a brutal and inhuman institution, must come to an end. The Society bombarded the United States Congress with petitions calling for the end of slavery. Congress did not respond favorably to these entreaties, and imposed “the gag rule,” barring all petitions concerning slavery from being presented in the House of Representatives. The peaceful tactics of the Anti-Slavery Society belied the radicalism of these abolitionists—the call to the end of slavery was a call for a radical revision of public policy and opinion. From the beginning, Garrisonians in the Anti-Slavery Society demanded an immediate end to slavery and a nonviolent revolution.²⁵ They called for the full equality of blacks and whites.

In these early years, opinion within the Anti-Slavery Society diverged, however, on the vexed question of what should be done with the freed people when slavery ended. Many abolitionists, including Garrison himself,

initially supported a plan, sponsored by the American Colonization Society (ACS), to return free and emancipated slaves to Africa. Northern free blacks were greatly distressed by the plan and perceived it as hostile to them. They did not want to be forced to travel to a foreign land; their families had lived in the United States for generations, and they regarded themselves as Americans not Africans. They argued that they should remain in their new homeland where they should receive the same political, economic, and social rights as whites. Moved by the opposition of free blacks to the idea of colonization, Garrison renounced his support for colonization, and began advocating that freed slaves should remain in the United States and be fully enfranchised.

By 1833, Garrison had emerged as the most vocal and best-known opponent of slavery. He remained the leading voice of abolition through most of the 1840s. Under his leadership, the American Anti-Slavery Society and its satellite organizations attracted more than 150,000 members by the end of the 1830s. Garrison had begun his career as an abolitionist in 1831, by publishing an abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator*, in Boston. He favored immediate and total abolition without any kind of “compensation” to slave owners, although he did concede that abolition might take place over a number of years and thus be gradually achieved. Within a few years, as he grew more radical, he would advocate that the entire United States Constitution should be abandoned, viewing it as deeply flawed by the concessions that had been made to slave owners about the unequal personhood of slaves.²⁶ He would become an important influence not only in Sojourner’s life, but also to Frederick Douglass, whose *Narrative* was sponsored by Garrison. Soon new groups of black and white, male and female leaders would emerge as the abolitionist movement grew. They would persist in their efforts until that dread institution was ended.

Abolitionists, however, did not speak with one voice, and abolitionism evolved over the years as change did not arrive. In the early years (around 1830), some members of the Anti-Slavery Society, including most members of the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society, thought that Garrison’s views were too radical. They agreed that slavery was wrong but also believed that the United States Constitution had created a legitimate government under which the people had the right to end oppression. Those moderate abolitionists hoped to work within the system to elect people of their beliefs to political offices to end slavery through legislation. They even formed a political party, the Liberty Party, which was active in the 1840s. The Tappan Brothers eventually broke with Garrison in the 1840s over his support of women leaders in the movement. In the 1850s, when national legislation passed that seemed to permit the expansion of slavery into the new Western states, the most radical abolitionists abandoned the tactic of nonviolent persuasion

and argued instead that only violence could end the crisis. Ultimately, the actions of these radical abolitionists overtook Garrison. Led by Frederick Douglass, John Brown, Gerrit Smith, and James McCune Smith, the abolitionist movement would help propel the country into a war that would end slavery across the country in 1865. These men:

saw themselves as prophets preparing for a new and glorious age—a new America that would be free from sin and oppression. They embraced the idea of “sacred self-sovereignty,” believing that the kingdom of God was within them and potentially within all individuals.²⁷

This social justice movement was infused throughout with the spirit of prophetic identity. Nonetheless, abolitionists remained divided until the end of the Civil War in 1865 when the United States ended slavery with the Thirteenth Amendment. The American Anti-Slavery Society finally disbanded in 1870.

Behind the argument for abolition lay a greater aspiration to revise underlying conceptions of race. But the claim that blacks and whites were fully equal as human beings and under the law would be lost in the bloodshed of the Civil War. Court decisions and legislation well into the twentieth century enforced severe racial distinction and racial preferences. Attempts to establish equality between the nation’s black and white citizens only gained traction in the 1960s, and yet racism still exists today and our nation’s blacks have still not achieved full equality. Entrenched poverty, school segregation, institutionalized disadvantage, and discriminatory enforcement of criminal laws paint the picture of a country where the color of your skin still plays a significant role in how people live and are treated.

RELIGIOUS REVIVAL

The religious world of 1843 New York State that Sojourner entered had been experiencing a 20-year-long period of growth and reinvigoration not felt since pre-Revolutionary days. This was the Second Great Awakening, a period of religious enthusiasm that led to revisions of two of Protestantism’s fundamental assumptions: humanity’s role in God’s plan of salvation, and God’s new revelation through chosen prophets and prophecies. During Isabella’s youth, northwestern New York State was afire with revivals, conversions, and a generalized religious fervor that affected Protestants all over the state, and ultimately, the country. So many itinerant preachers and evangelists crisscrossed this area during the 1820s and 30s that these counties of northwestern New York came to be called the “Burned Over District,” as though the land had been proverbially burned over by the religious fervor of the people who lived there. Presbyterian, Congregationalist, and Methodist

preachers vied for new converts, introduced new ideas of sanctification, and brought back outdoor religious revivals. Until her emancipation, Isabella was virtually unaware of these theological shifts. As soon as she was emancipated, however, she began to attend revivals, and identify as a Methodist Perfectionist in the holiness movement. When she reached New York City in 1828, she joined mixed race Methodist Perfectionist and all black African Methodist circles.²⁸

The most celebrated Protestant preacher of the Second Great Awakening in New York was Charles Grandison Finney; his revisions of Protestantism led to the growth of numerous religiously motivated and affiliated social reform movements. Born in 1792, he was almost the same age as Isabella. Although Finney initially intended to become a lawyer, in 1821 the deeply religious man experienced a strong religious awakening while attending the early revivals of the Second Great Awakening. He immediately dropped the study of law, became a Presbyterian minister and began leading his own revivals. Finney acquired a reputation for his unorthodox revival techniques. He would encourage the whole audience to participate in the frenzy and, most controversially, he called on women, who until then were expected to remain silent in church, to cry out from their seats in the pews when the spirit moved them.

Eventually Finney grew frustrated with Presbyterianism's gloomy and pessimistic emphasis on original sin. He began preaching a more positive new doctrine that he called Perfectionism. According to Finney, men and women were not irredeemably mired in sin, but could live perfectly to please God. The oppressive weight of original sin, as preached by traditional Calvinists, was shifted under Finney's doctrine of Perfectionism. His revisions brought new hope and elicited sustained participation from his followers. Christians, Finney asserted, were capable of perfect love for their fellows in humanity, and the expression of this love would contribute to their own salvation. This was unheard of under traditional Calvinist doctrine, where the fate of the eternal soul was determined solely by God's unknowable decision. Human activity was worth something to God, according to Finney. This was a revolutionary idea, and one that was soon spread through many Christian denominations, including the Methodists and the black church. Perfectionist social activists believed that, through social activism, they expressed their love for humanity and thereby bore witness to their own salvation. "What is perfection?" Finney asked in one of his sermons. "It is to love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. That is, it requires us not to become divinely perfect, but only to be perfect as it is possible for human beings with our own powers."²⁹

Finney's contention revolutionized what it meant to live as an awakened Christian, and catapulted his followers into social reform. Christians of the

Second Great Awakening launched numerous social movements aimed at saving the world from the social ills of drinking, gambling, prostitution, poverty, and slavery. Finney was outspoken in his support of abolition and equal rights for women. All over New York, awakened Christians began campaigns against slavery, prostitution, poverty and all manner of the social ills of the streets. Some Perfectionists believed that strict personal asceticism, the rejection of tobacco, cigarettes, rich foods, and luxuries deemed self-indulgent further adorned their virtuous strivings; a number of Perfectionists even adopted total celibacy, as religious revivalism spread into the bedroom.

In 1832, Finney left the Burnt Over District and moved to New York City where he established his own ministry—the Chatham Street Chapel. He attracted such large crowds that he quickly moved to the much larger, 2,400-seat Broadway Tabernacle. Under his leadership, the practice of Perfectionism was widely adopted in progressive Protestant evangelical circles and beyond. Not only Presbyterian, but also Baptist and Methodist denominations (including the Black Methodist churches) embraced Perfectionism. So influential was Finney's new doctrine that even older preachers, like the Presbyterian Lyman Beecher (born 1775), father of Harriet Beecher Stowe and co-founder of the Temperance movement, adopted Finney's "New Measures."

Despite his success, Finney resolved in 1835 to leave New York. He accepted an appointment as a professor of theology at Oberlin College, in Ohio. Two years later, in 1837, he agreed to become the minister of the First Congregational Church at Oberlin, and was named the second president of the college in 1852. The town of Oberlin, Ohio, already well-known as a center of abolition, was an important stop on the Underground Railroad. From Oberlin, Finney published his *Lectures on Revivals*, which were widely used by American revivalists, and the *Lectures on Theology*, that set forth his theological understandings. His influence on the evangelical denominations of the antebellum period was immense. Many adopted his revival techniques. Some adopted his stance on abolition. A much smaller number supported equal rights for women. Protestant Perfectionists allied with radical Quakers who had long advocated abolition and equal rights for women. The Second Great Awakening, then, culminated in a revision of how humans thought about their relationship to God and sin, and opened the door for revisions of the entire social order. In some cases, the possibility of human perfection fueled radical visions of new utopias on earth. Aspirations for a new and perfect lifestyle gave rise to communitarian religious groups like the Shakers, Fruitlands, and the Oneida Perfectionists where all were seen together as equals under "a new law."

Beyond the new doctrine of Perfectionism, the Second Great Awakening also importantly gave rise to the idea that God was close at hand and

announced by prophets preaching new revelations. Starting in the 1830s, numerous new religious movements, some still well-known, others barely remembered, began sprouting up all over the Northeast, especially in the Burned Over District and western Massachusetts. The founders of these movements claimed to be prophets, the recipients of new revelations. Their claims attracted many followers. Famously, Joseph Smith, the founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints, used the story of his own prophetic visions to found his religious movement, now known as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, or more commonly, the Mormon church. Today, that religion is still growing, and has over 13 million members worldwide. Joseph Smith is still regarded as a prophet by his followers. Another famous contemporary of Sojourner's, William Miller, was a Baptist preacher and founder of the Millerite movement. He claimed to know by divine revelation the date when the earth would end, which he placed sometime in 1844. Even when Miller's original date passed without the prophesied Armageddon, his followers did not abandon him. Miller recalculated and the followers patiently waited a few months longer. It was not until that time, too, elapsed without event that his followers began to drop away, in a retreat called "The Great Disappointment." At the height of the Millerite movement, over two million people eagerly awaited the rapture. The remnants of the Millerite movement have been transformed into the religious group that we now know as the Seventh Day Adventists.

Nineteenth century black slaves across America had likewise drawn upon the power of "prophetic" speech to radically challenge the institutions of slavery and to inspire rebellion. In 1831, the privileged and literate Virginia slave, Nat Turner, began preaching about racial injustice and describing his visions of the cosmic struggle between good and evil. Employing evocative biblical imagery, he likened the institution of slavery to a black serpent in a mighty struggle with Christ, the Liberator. He described visions in which the forces of good rose up to defeat the evil Serpent. When Turner witnessed a solar eclipse, he interpreted this event as a sign that his followers should immediately rise up to overcome the white slaveholders. On Turner's orders, 60–70 slaves killed nearly 50 white slaveholders of all ages and sexes by hacking or stabbing them to death as they slept. Nat Turner's revolt shocked and terrified white southerners and the slaveholding class. His execution in 1832 was accompanied by new laws in the South, prohibiting any black slave or former slave from preaching or attending religious services that were not specifically authorized by whites. Turner had leveraged the authority of the prophetic voice to radically challenge and attack the *status quo*.

This idea of a prophetic age found further support in a biblical concept of the advent of Christ's millennium as described in the New Testament Book of Revelations. Millennialists believed that Christ had returned to

Earth to establish the 1,000 year kingdom before the final judgment and the resurrection. The advent of the millennial kingdom at once heralded the end of times, and the beginning of an age in which supernatural events would occur. Millennialists believed that this era would be marked by many changes on earth: cataclysmic events, new prophecies, or a reordering of human relationships. Mormons and Millerites were millennialists whose groups trace their origins to this belief. Other groups of non-Christian new religions abandoned the Old and New Testaments in favor of entirely new revelations; the most famous of these were the Spiritualists and the Christian Scientists. Other, less successful, prophets led new religious movements. Isabella was herself a member of one such group, the followers of the "Prophet Matthias." Matthias, though at first believed to be a Prophet, eventually disappeared in a torrent of scandal, but other self-styled prophets of the day were not so quickly dismissed. The success of groups like the Mormons, the Adventists, and the Christian Scientists rested on belief in new prophets. Even the brief popularity of the Spiritualism of the Fox Sisters, who fraudulently claimed to be able to communicate with the dead, also relied on claims of supernatural powers of communication, and spawned a widespread popular practice of holding séances that were often led by women. Sojourner moved in and through these times. As a result, she, like so many others, believed that God loved and cared about humanity, that God wanted neighbors to love one another, and that this might entail radical revisions to the social order, religious practice, and church hierarchy, and of revelation. Sojourner was one of the first to convert her holiness preaching into social justice activism on the issues of her day; in these footsteps would come many other black mystic activists, including Howard Thurman, Martin Luther King Jr., and Malcolm X. Like Sojourner, they spoke with the firm conviction that God cared about human justice and human conditions.

THE SUFFRAGIST CAUSE

Coinciding with the birth of the abolitionist and women's rights movement in New York, Jacksonian Democracy of the 1830s expanded the political rights of white men in America. To many, Jacksonian Democracy is esteemed for democratizing America because suffrage, or voting rights, expanded beyond rich white landowners to white men of all classes and income levels. Ironically, as rights for white men of all income and class levels grew, blacks and women found their rights increasingly restricted at the hands of the conservative (and mainly southern) men of the Democratic Party.

Jacksonian Democrats wished to circumscribe the voting rights of free blacks, Native Americans and women. Jackson's Democratic Party offered

bigotry as its prime rationale, proclaimed the subservience of women, and openly suggested that blacks were enslaved only because they were naturally inferior to whites. At first, some northern states followed this lead. New Jersey, Connecticut, and Rhode Island denied free black men the right to vote. In Rhode Island, the ban was reversed by popular acclaim in 1842. In New York, where Sojourner lived, the state first considered a total ban on black voting but ultimately decided in 1821 that black men would be allowed to vote, as long as they could prove that they passed a net property threshold—but one set at a higher level than the property threshold for white men.

Women's rights advocates lobbied unsuccessfully in the decades that preceded the Civil War to extend voting rights to women. The leaders of this movement—Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucy Stone, and Susan B. Anthony—were joined by other women, and some male abolitionists. Interestingly, the most vehement opposition to the women's suffrage movement came from some of the same religious leaders who supported abolition: Protestant evangelicals, like the Tappan brothers, and many black ministers asserted that women should remain in their "separate spheres." Suffragists immediately attacked this "separate spheres" understanding of the appropriate roles for men and women as a disguise for retaining the *status quo*.³⁰ Many in the women's suffrage movement borrowed language from the abolition movement, and sometimes well-known activists, like Frederick Douglass and Gerrit Smith, spoke in support of both causes. Douglass even attended the first women's convention, the Seneca Falls Convention, which took place in Seneca Falls, New York in 1848. Seneca Falls was in the same area of upstate New York that had experienced great activity during the Second Great Awakening, and was also close to Palmyra, New York, where Joseph Smith had launched his religious movement. The Convention concluded with the publication of the Women's Declaration of Rights and Sentiments. That Declaration was modeled on the Declaration of Independence, and explicitly drew parallels between the institution of slavery and the oppression of women. American women would not see their voting rights legally recognized until the twentieth century, when in 1918 the 19th Amendment, granting women the right to vote, was added to the Bill of Rights.

Fewer religiously connected social justice activists worked to advance the women's rights agenda, perhaps because then, as now, many religious institutions, both white and black, had institutionalized and enforced the patriarchy. Even Sojourner herself did not seem to stand for the full equality of women, and accepted that her intellectual capacity could be a "little pint" compared to a man's "large pint." The irony of the growing call for rights and suffrage was, of course, that as the door opened wider for white men, the very same newly enfranchised men sought more firmly to close and restrict

the rights of women and blacks (and Indians). Even after the end of slavery voting rights of blacks would be hobbled in southern states by Jim Crow laws imposing poll taxes, literacy tests, and other barriers. It was not until the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that black citizens of the South fully realized their right to vote.

CAPTURING THE CHANGE: AR'N'T I A WOMAN?

In her 50s, Sojourner actively participated in both the abolition and the suffrage movements, and as her individual spirituality intertwined with the religious revisions and innovations of her day, she came to believe that her work was divinely ordained. The changes in her life as an individual paralleled the very transformations that were driving the country to revise and reform core principles of race, religion, and rights. She was a leading abolitionist, and a former slave. She was an outspoken advocate for women's rights, and a woman. She was also a mystic and a prophet for the new social justice. Sojourner's status as a prophet would only be acknowledged when Harriet Beecher Stowe published her popular article in 1863, comparing Sojourner to a Greek oracle or prophet of antiquity, a Sibyl. Long before she received this title, though, her audiences recognized that Sojourner Truth spoke with unique power as she explained why her God cared about people like her, and wanted justice and fair treatment for all the women and blacks of her day. Sojourner officially began her activism three years after the Seneca Falls convention. She first began speaking about abolition in 1850, and then spoke at a women's convention in Akron, Ohio, in 1851. From then on she would advocate forcefully and effectively on behalf of abolition, women's rights, and civil rights. Her identity as a formerly enslaved black woman allowed her to make the stories of her oppressions into a living example for all the land.

Sojourner Truth, who also spoke with a prophetic voice about religious matters, was squarely at the center of these trends as she ascended the stage in Akron, Ohio, to make the speech that made her famous. Although questioned for its accuracy, the transcript of her "Ar'n't I a Woman" speech recorded by Frances Gage has deftly been compared to the contemporaneous news article by Marius Robinson, and shown by Margaret Washington to accurately capture the most significant points in Sojourner's actual speech.³¹ The Akron women's convention of 1851 had already been meeting for a couple of days when Sojourner came to the stage. It was known that the black preacher lady was present in the audience, and the organizers of the conference were nervous about letting her speak, ostensibly because they feared that she might turn the women's convention into an abolitionist rally. The white women organizers whispered that the black woman might

“drag down” the tone of the conference. Nonetheless, on that hot June day, Sojourner sat on the stairs to the stage, and waited her turn.

Sojourner Truth presented a commanding figure as she ascended the stage and took her place at the podium. She was then about 53 years old, tall, about six feet by most accounts, and all muscle and sinew from her years of hard labor. Her unlined, dark black skin was accented by the contrast with her white shawl and turban. Frances Gage later described her recollection of Sojourner,

head erect, and eyes piercing the upper air like one in a dream. At her first word there was a profound hush. She spoke in deep tones, which, though not loud, reached every ear in the house.

Sojourner drew in the audience with her remarkable voice: she had as much strength as a man, for she had worked as hard as any man; she was the equal of any man, and she certainly possessed all the wit with which she had been endowed. Why then, she asked, did men not yield women their rights. She drew herself up, and in her preacherly and inspired style, she found her answer in the Bible. Perhaps it was true, she reasoned, that Eve, the first woman, had been the source of sin in the world, but another woman, the Virgin Mary, was the mother of God, of Jesus. Without Mary there would have been no Jesus. Jesus had no other earthly progenitor Sojourner pointed out, and men had no part in that, she concluded. Sojourner returned to her seat amid thunderous applause. For the next 10 years she would command and delight audiences with her insight, bravery, charm, and wit, as she helped to reshape public opinion on rights and race, in this most critical decade leading up to the Civil War.

Sojourner was propelled into the public eye after incipient tensions over race and rights brought the issue of slavery to a crisis point in 1850, the very year that she published her *Narrative*. The mounting tensions were nowhere more evident than in the enactment and implementation of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. As a concession for permitting California to join the union as a free state, the North conceded the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. The Act provided that any fugitive slave who was found living or hiding anywhere in the free northern states must be returned to slavery in the South, and it opened the door for the expansion of slavery into the western territories. An outraged Frederick Douglass denounced the act as a “Bloodhound Bill.” Fugitive slaves, and even free blacks in the North, quite reasonably feared that they were not safe from the slave catchers anywhere in the United States. Thousands emigrated to Canada; others went to England. Many white abolitionists swore that they would give their lives, and the lives of their families, rather than to turn over runaway slaves. No

one was safe, and public discussions of abolition could lead to life or death situations. Conflicts and mob violence erupted around the country.

By mid-century new religious prophets were in hiding or in flight. After enduring persecution and violence, in 1847 Mormons struck out on their great trek across the plains to establish the Kingdom of Zion in Utah. Fleeing Mormons kept crossing the plains until 1869. Other new sectarian communities—like the Oneida community, founded in 1848—increasingly set themselves apart from mainline Protestantism, and often from mainstream society. Despite the failed prophecies of William Miller 15 years earlier, 1848 marked the beginning of an era when successful religious prophecies and visions prompted the establishment of new religious communities and movements.

NOTES

1. Olive Gilbert, *Margaret Washington*, ed. (New York: Vintage Classics, 1993), 13–14, and 80.
2. Her first known signature dates from 1861; it consists of a squiggly line and an ill-drawn triangle that today, might be assumed to have been drawn by a child.
3. Cornell West, speaking to George Yancey on August 15, 2015, published online as “Cornell West: the Fire of a New Generation,” available online at: <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/08/19/cornell-west-the-fire-of-a-new-generation/> (accessed September 26, 2015).
4. Harriet Beecher Stowe, “Sojourner Truth, The Libyan Sibyl,” *Atlantic Monthly* 11 (April 1863): 473–481. Sojourner is also present as a character in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s more famous novel, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.
5. Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth A Life, A Symbol* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996), 17.
6. Sojourner Truth, d. 1883, Olive Gilbert, and Frances W. Titus, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth; a Bondswoman of Olden Time, Emancipated by the New York Legislature in the Early Part of the Present Century; with a History of Her Labors and Correspondence, Drawn from Her “Book of Life”* (Boston: For the Author, 1875); and Sojourner Truth, d. 1883, Olive Gilbert, and Frances W. Titus, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth: a Bondswoman of Olden Time, Emancipated by the New York Legislature in the Early Part of the Present Century; with a History of Her Labors and Correspondence Drawn from Her “Book of Life;” Also, a Memorial Chapter, Giving the Particulars of Her Last Sickness and Death* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald Office, 1884).
7. Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, 1892 (New York: Collier Books, 1962).
8. Gilbert and Titus, *Narrative* (1875), *Book of Life*, 134–6.
9. Carleton Mabree and Susan Mabree Newhouse, *Sojourner Truth: Slave, Prophet, Legend* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 81.
10. Painter, *Sojourner Truth*; and Margaret Washington, *Sojourner Truth’s America*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009).
11. Witness the longstanding publication of Jim Wallis’ progressive Christian magazine, “Sojourners: Faith in Action for Social Justice” described at “History,” available online at: <http://sojo.net/about-us/history> (accessed June 1, 2014).
12. The Bible, Authorized (King James) Version, Genesis 23.1.4; Leviticus 22.1.10, 25.1.23, 25.1.25; 25.12, 3.4; Numbers 35.1; 2 Samuel 4.1; 1; Chronicles 29.1 and Psalms 39.1.12.
13. Stowe, “Libyan Sibyl,” 479.
14. Paul E. Johnson and Sean Wilentz, *The Kingdom of Matthias: A Story of Sex and Salvation in 19th-Century* (New York: Oxford, 1995), 91–125.
15. *Ibid.*, 38.

16. Bernard McGinn, Ed., *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism* (New York: Modern Library, 2006), xiv.
17. Gilbert and Titus, *Narrative* (1875), *Book of Life*, 147.
18. Shane White, *Somewhat More Independent: The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770–1810* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 3–23.
19. *Ibid.*, 27.
20. *Ibid.*, 18–23.
21. *Ibid.*, 55; and MacManus, *Black Bondage*, 181.
22. Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 228.
23. N.Y. Const. of 1821, Art. II, §1, reproduced in Francis Thorpe, *The Federal and State Constitutions, Colonial Charters, and Other Organic Laws of the States, Territories, and Colonies Now or Heretofore Forming the United States of America, 2642–2643* (1909).
24. Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789–1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 3–38.
25. Herbert Apthekar, *Abolitionism: A Revolutionary Movement* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989).
26. Paul Finkelman, “The Root of the Problem: How the Proslavery Constitution Shaped American Race Relations,” 4 *Barry Law Review* 1 (2001), 1–19.
27. John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 2.
28. Jon Butler, Grant Wacker, and Randall Balmer, *Religion in American Life: A Short History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).
29. Charles Grandison Finney, “Christian Perfection,” *Lectures To Professing Christians* (London: Longley, 1837), 93–112.
30. Sally G. McMillen, *Seneca Falls and the Origins of the Women’s Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).
31. See Documents 1 and 2 below, and Washington, *Sojourner Truth’s America*, 224–5.

4

ISABELLA FORD (1855–1924) AND WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

June Hannam

In 1913, when the fight for women's suffrage captured all the headlines, Isabella Ford wrote a letter to her old socialist friend Edward Carpenter and exclaimed 'Oh this dreadful vote battle! I am sure we shall win at once in the new Parliament'. Here she was juxtaposing the view that the battle for the vote was a dreadful one, perhaps because it had taken up so much time over so many years, with optimism that it was soon to be won. The reason for her optimism was that the Labour Party had formed a pact in 1912 with the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) which, on a formal level, brought together the two movements that she had been a part of since the 1890s. What this meant to her on a personal, emotional level is encapsulated in the next sentence in her letter. Labour meetings were 'so splendid that I feel comradeship, the real thing, is growing fast, just because of this battle. I never felt anything like it sometimes & it's growing amongst our sort of women I feel like bursting with joy over it at times'.¹

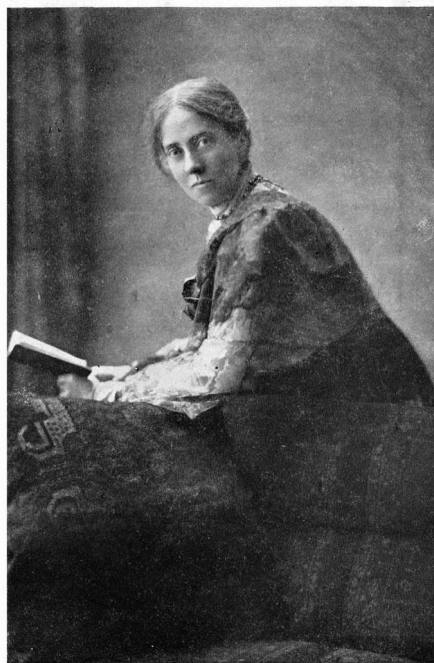
This draws our attention to a number of issues. For Isabella Ford the campaign for the vote was an integral part of a much broader politics which had at its heart the improvement of the lives of working-class women. Her socialist politics provided a framework for the way in which she approached suffrage campaigning, while, at the same time, her commitment to women's rights informed her socialism. She became active in public life at an exciting time for women who questioned the social norms that constrained their lives. Socialist groups that developed in the 1880s and 90s were open to women as well as men. In their meetings and clubs they had stimulating discussions about marriage, the family and the relationship between the sexes as well as exploring economic questions.² These developments occurred alongside the demand for the vote which raised issues about what it meant for a woman to be a political campaigner and an active citizen. Both movements encouraged women to express their hopes of achieving a

better world for women, men and children, often in highly emotional language. Indeed it was a deep emotional engagement with the politics of change that sustained women's political activism over a lengthy period.

In the recent centennial commemorations of the passing of the 1918 Representation of the People Act, when most women aged 30 years and more gained the vote for the first time, it was pointed out by many suffrage historians that the focus of the media was on the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), including its leaders Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst, and on the militant methods of the suffragettes.³ This raised an important issue about what story should be told about the struggle for the vote, in particular in the many popular histories that were inspired by the celebrations. The narrative that women fought for the vote in a single minded way, using militant methods to achieve their aims, and were willing to go to prison for their cause, remains a central one despite extensive research that has shown the diversity and complexity of the movement.⁴ It has diverted attention away from the extent to which women, including many members of the WSPU, viewed the suffrage campaign as part of a broader politics which they hoped would bring change to women's lives.

Within popular narratives of the campaign for the vote socialist women and the labour movement tend to be side lined. It is perhaps timely, therefore, to take a new look at the socialist and suffrage campaigner Isabella Ford (1855–1924) who exemplified the inextricable links between the two movements.⁵ She grew up in a wealthy Quaker family in Leeds. Her radical liberal parents were involved in political and social reform movements, including the campaign for the abolition of slavery, for working-class education and for women's rights. Like a number of women of her class, generation and background Isabella Ford became involved with the labour movement, helping to organise tailoresses and textile workers into trade unions in the 1880s and 1890s. With her sister Bessie she became a socialist, joining the Independent Labour Party (ILP) when it was formed in 1893. As a skilful speaker and writer Isabella Ford gradually gained a national as well as a local reputation as a propagandist for socialism and suffrage and as an expert on women's industrial position. In 1903 she was elected onto the National Administrative Council of the ILP. She held this position until 1907 when she decided, for the short term, to prioritise the campaign for women's suffrage. She then stood successfully for election to the executive committee of the NUWSS. Her aim was to bring the women's movement and the labour movement closer together and she was a vocal supporter of the 1912 alliance between the Labour Party and the NUWSS.⁶

Thirty years ago I wrote a biography of Isabella Ford. This was shaped by my own political interests and by the concerns of those who were writing biographies at that time.⁷ I was interested in exploring the relationship between the different ideas and movements of which Isabella Ford was a part, in particular socialism, feminism and peace. The biography suggested that an in-depth study of one person's life and ideas could reveal some surprising connections between movements that often seemed separate in mainstream histories. It also used her life to



ISABELLA O. FORD

FIGURE 4.1 Isabella Ford, c1889, June Purvis Private Suffrage Collection

examine the networks of friendship that were so important in sustaining and inspiring the social movements of which she was a part.

A biographical approach has continued to be important for suffrage historians.⁸ A focus on women who were active at a local as well as a national level has revealed the diverse and complex nature of the movement and has helped historians to get away from stereotypes and generalisations. In a recent article Sandra Holton has raised the importance of looking at personal history at a micro level, rather than writing a full biography. She suggests that the emphasis should be on analysing the significance of events for individual lives and the cultural meanings attaching to relationships and events. She argues that this will help to demonstrate the wider meanings of the demand for the vote, to reveal the movement's capacity to create an increasingly diverse social and political base and to clarify the complex set of strategies that were adopted.⁹

This provides a helpful way forward in taking a new look at Isabella Ford. By removing the need to construct a narrative of a life, structured by a sense of chronology, it becomes more possible to explore a range of questions in greater depth. This chapter, therefore, will look at what women's suffrage meant to Isabella Ford and why it was so important to her politics. It will analyse her ideas, the spaces in which those ideas were expressed and any shifts that took place over

time, often in response to external pressures and events. It will also discuss the significance that emotions played in her political journey, in explaining both what drew her into campaigning for socialism and for suffrage and also in what sustained her commitment to those movements. It will explore how she used emotions, including the feelings of others, in her attempt to inspire women and men to become more actively involved.

Psycho-social studies have emphasised the importance of 'reincorporating emotions into research on politics and protest'. They argue that too often academic observers portray human beings as rational and instrumental in their political views and actions and 'ignore the swirl of passions all around them in political life'.¹⁰ A focus on the emotions has gendered implications. Women have tended to be characterised as 'emotional' or 'hysterical' and therefore less able to engage with the rational world of politics. This was used by their opponents to argue against women's suffrage. On the other hand, 19th-century women's rights campaigners used emotions associated with women's family role, such as compassion and moral integrity, to justify their involvement in social welfare outside the home. Suffrage campaigners had to be careful about how emotions were managed and used. Nonetheless an expression of emotions permeated the women's suffrage campaign of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Isabella Ford's own political theory and practice was underpinned by strong emotions and feelings. These were expressed explicitly, not just in the letters that she wrote but also in her public speeches and writings. It will be suggested here that an analysis of her emotional language can shed light on what attracted women to the suffrage movement and what sustained their involvement. This requires not just a textual analysis but an understanding of feelings and unconscious elements and their relationship to lived experience.¹¹ It raises questions of how political activists related to others who were active and to those who were not, about how politics informed their everyday lives and how the latter informed their politics, since private feelings and politics were not separate but were closely entwined.¹²

Why did Isabella Ford decide to give so much of her time to political activity? This was not an easy route to personal fulfilment. Women as public figures faced hostility from their own class, from the press and from audiences at their meetings. When Isabella Ford championed the tailoresses during their strike, for example, she was subject to 'much opposition and abuse'.¹³ The work of political activists was often exhausting as they travelled long distances to address endless meetings in all weathers. They had to face the disappointments of political setbacks as well as frequent ill health. In a stimulating article on the emotions as 'capital' in the Swedish suffrage movement, Christina Florin suggests that women's commitment to suffrage 'was rooted in experiences that had touched profound depths of feeling and had set an inner process in motion'.¹⁴ It was their experience of social injustice in everyday life that often provided the starting point of their interest in social action.

Isabella Ford's initial interest in women's suffrage and the lives of working women, as well as her belief that, as a woman, she could help to change the world,

came from her early family life and the commitment of her parents to social and political reform. Movements in Europe for national identity and against authoritarian regimes, led by men such as Kossuth, Mazzini and Garibaldi, inspired her parents to believe that change was possible. Her father was described as 'an idealist and a passionate lover of liberty', although he was 'old fashioned' in opposing his daughters' desire for higher education and involvement in women's suffrage.¹⁵ It was their mother Hannah, a campaigner for women's rights, who had radical views about what it was possible for women to achieve. She 'quietly nourished active rebellion' in her daughters and Isabella Ford later recalled that she taught them to 'never laugh at what is new'.¹⁶ On a more practical level Isabella and her sisters, Bessie and Emily, came into close contact with girls who worked in the textile mills of Leeds. Their parents helped to finance a night school for mill girls and from the age of 16 the three sisters gave lessons there twice a week. Emily Ford recalled that we 'sometimes visited the girls at their work or in their homes and so became intimate with their manner of life, and all this helped as a training for her [Isabella] in her later social work'.¹⁷

The Ford sisters were fortunate to grow up in a context in which, as young women, they were able to live away from home and to absorb the many new ideas of the period about ways in which women could live a full life and determine their own destiny.¹⁸ The possibilities that this opened up for them is described in a perceptive obituary of Isabella Ford written by her friend Katharine Bruce Glasier, a leading socialist propagandist. She pointed out that in her novel *On the Threshold*, 'Isabel Ford gave racy descriptions of the wild sense of adventure with which she and Bessie and a dozen or so women of like spirit, had found themselves in London studying its University courses, and living in chambers or flats, where the smaller the rooms, the vaster were the ideals; the barer the boards, the richer were the dreams of what freedom for women to train and fit themselves for work of all kinds might mean to the world'.¹⁹ For Isabella these aspirations were soon channelled into work for the trade union movement. Her mother was unusual in taking an interest in the work conditions of working-class women, rather than focusing on the poverty of their home lives. She subscribed to the *Women's Union Journal* and *The Beehive*, where Isabella was able to read about women's work and wages.²⁰ Hannah Ford was also a friend of Emma Paterson, president of the Women's Protective and Provident League, an umbrella group that helped to set up all female trade unions and societies.²¹

It was Emma Paterson who, in 1885, persuaded Isabella to become involved with the Leeds Tailoresses' Union and she was soon caught up in a wave of strikes among less skilled workers in the area. Isabella took a key role in the Leeds Tailoresses' Strike of 1889 and the strike of textile workers at Manningham Mills, Bradford in 1891. These strikes and her subsequent work as a union organiser gave her first-hand knowledge and experience of the conditions of women's work and also roused her sense of social injustice. She later claimed 'I have never felt absolute hunger ... but these girls did. We found some of them desperate with hunger, and supplied a breakfast of tea and bread and butter every morning'.²² J. J. Mallon

believed that she was ‘well- nigh maddened in contemplation of a cruelty that could look without emotion on such extremity of suffering’.²³ According to Emily Ford ‘it was then and there ... that her decision to take the Labour side of life became final. She did not shrink from any of the disagreeableness of combat. She did not look back, but from that moment she remained faithful to her comrades’.²⁴

From the beginning Isabella Ford believed that women needed both trade union organisation and the vote if they were to improve their industrial position. This involved a change in women’s own perception of what might be possible as well as structural changes which would help them to achieve this. In an interview in the *Western Mail* in 1893 following a lecture she had given in London on women’s wages that had been widely criticised in the metropolitan press, she explained that trade unions made ‘men think, and that is what we want women to do. When once you educate women, cultivate their intelligence, you stimulate their better ambitions. They are no longer content with the low shallow lot that has been theirs in the past’.²⁵ Wider ambitions could also mean that they might choose not to marry. Once they were no longer content with poor wages and low-skilled work then they would ‘long for independence and a career. Quietly dropping the old idea that the only glory of life is to be married’.²⁶ Along with many others at this time Isabella was keen to challenge the view that politics was somehow separate from personal issues such as marriage and family relationships. It is worth noting, however, that she rarely raised this issue in her later writings and speeches. Instead she explored questions of marriage and women’s independence only in her fiction.²⁷ As Isabella Ford rose to greater prominence in the ILP and then the NUWSS, she had to be more careful not to alienate working men who held traditional views about family life or to give opponents of women’s suffrage the excuse to label the movement as immoral.

Nonetheless, the keystone of her argument in the interview, which was to remain consistent in later years, was that women needed the vote to give them a higher status which would ensure better work conditions and higher wages. Even textile workers, who were well organised, knew their worth and received a fair rate of pay, would gain from having the vote. It would ensure that they took ‘an intelligent interest’ in affairs outside the home and also that any Bills dealing with the welfare of women would be treated more seriously in the House of Commons.

Isabella Ford’s direct experience of strikes, in which she took a hands on role, organising strike pay and walking with the protesting women workers through sleet and rain, also led to a growing conviction that in the long term only socialism could ensure true freedom for women and men. She joined the ILP when it was formed in 1893 and was to remain a member for the rest of her life. This was not an easy decision since at that time ‘everyone thought only the lowest of the low was in the labour movement’, but Isabella and her sister Bessie ‘fearlessly proclaimed themselves socialist’.²⁸ During the Tailoresses’ Strike Isabella had found that Liberal employers were just as bad as Conservative ones in the bitter and insolent way they treated women who dared to strike. This convinced her that

'sex hatred' and 'sex contempt on the part of men towards women was underlying our social structure'.²⁹ In the Leeds ILP, however, she found different attitudes: 'I believe woman has the right to her own individuality, and to be recognized as equally important with man, in all matters. In this club I found men and women who entirely agreed with me'.³⁰ A few years later she explained that she joined the Leeds ILP because 'I found their object was to bring about a happier state of affairs for working men and women'.³¹ She argued consistently that socialism and women's suffrage had to go together. When Keir Hardie supported a women's suffrage bill she wrote to thank him since he recognised that it is 'only from a real democracy that a real socialism can spring and that we can have no such democracy and therefore no such socialism until we have our women as well as our men enfranchised and free'.³² She believed that women working for the suffrage movement 'have seen what sorrow and suffering exist in the world, and have thus learned what the aim of Socialism is'.³³ This argument was made even more strongly when the Labour Party had made its pact with the NUWSS. She thought that men could not achieve a new society on their own and that 'women as the greater sufferers must help them. Knowledge based on suffering has irresistible weight and power'.³⁴

When she gave most of her energies to the women's suffrage campaign after 1906 Isabella Ford's propaganda continued to focus on the importance of the vote for the woman worker. Whether she was addressing suffrage groups, labour organisations or public meetings the subject of her speeches was usually either the sweated woman worker or textile workers in Yorkshire and Lancashire.³⁵ She was not alone in this – Margaret Ashton, for example, a Manchester city councillor, spoke regularly on women's wages and the suffrage, as did Maude Royden, whose influential pamphlet, *Votes and Wages*, had a frontispiece designed by Isabella Ford's sister, Emily.³⁶ Both Margaret Ashton and Maude Royden came from liberal backgrounds and were described by Sandra Holton as 'democratic suffragists'. The ILP socialist Ethel Snowden also explored similar themes. When she addressed the Leeds Women's Suffrage Society she argued that if women had the vote 'the industrial conditions of this country would be improved, for the government would have to realise that they must give equality to their servants of both sexes'.³⁷ Isabella Ford's articles provided detailed arguments about the relationship between the vote and improved work conditions which combined evidence based on surveys and statistics with strongly felt emotions. In a lengthy response to Mrs Colquhoun, an anti-suffragist, she pointed out that those who were privileged did not suffer as greatly from their exclusion from the franchise as poorer women did. It was therefore the opinion of workers, who had to 'face life's hardships and cruelties' that was of the greatest importance. She then went on to quote numerous authorities, ranging from politicians such as Lloyd George, to leading trade unionists and well-known social surveys to support her claim that the vote would tend to a rise in women's wages.³⁸

Christina Florin has argued that politics were not just about forming opinions and solving problems but that the battles that were fought, and any achievements that

were won, were deeply felt. The drama of the suffrage campaign in itself generated strong feelings which could be used in the campaign for the vote.³⁹ In Britain this was most apparent when the election of a Liberal government in 1906, coupled with the daring actions of members of the WSPU, brought women's suffrage into greater prominence and gave women optimism that their goal might soon be achieved. It was in this context that Isabella Ford's public speeches and writings were explicit about her emotions, in particular her optimism. In an article published in the *Labour Leader* that described a large women's suffrage meeting at the Exeter Hall, London, she wished that those who had started the movement 'could have been there to see the splendid progress our cause has made, and how near, how very near, we are now to obtaining that freedom they so ardently desired'.⁴⁰ She was keen to reassure the readers of this socialist journal that one cause for optimism was the election of Labour MPs. Reporting on one meeting between suffragists and MPs she claimed that this was 'a time of rejoicing' since even Millicent Fawcett had 'referred to the Labour movement having brought a new force and spirit into the women's party'. Isabella believed that it was the first time women's suffrage had entered the realm of practical politics and that women who were not socialists were beginning to see this was due to the Labour movement. 'They are understanding better what socialism means— freedom for all'.⁴¹

Isabella continued to express optimism—both that the vote would soon be won and that suffragists were becoming more convinced of the importance of socialism—despite setbacks along the way. When she attended the Women's International Congress of 1908 she was very emotional to find that most of the German women were socialists. 'We women will fight for freedom everywhere and no woman needs to feel she is now alone ... now is the day of women's freedom ... of the coming of a full and complete socialism at hand and my heart was full within me'.⁴² She had a real sense that history was being made and urged the Labour Party to espouse the suffrage cause 'boldly and definitely. If they did so they would win for themselves a place in history which would never be forgotten'.⁴³ These optimistic views were not just expressed in public for tactical reasons but were sincerely felt. In a private letter to Millicent Fawcett Isabella described some encouraging meetings among factory workers and claimed 'our cause is going splendidly', while in a later letter to Miss Strachey she said 'I feel sure this time next year we shall have votes'.⁴⁴ Her optimism—and the joy expressed in the opening quotation—was felt even more strongly when the Labour Party made its pact with the NUWSS in 1912. She was fully aware that the Labour Party had not always been supportive up to that point but wanted to reassure suffrage campaigner that it would not let the women down now. She realised that she might sound 'foolishly optimistic' but turned such feelings into a strategy for action. 'I have never found that anything but good comes in the long run from expecting much of people, and believing much in them. Such belief and expectation puts them on their mettle and brings out the sense of honour which surely lies in all of us'.⁴⁵

And yet such feelings could sit alongside quite different ones. Both Isabella and Bessie often found members of the Leeds Women's Suffrage Society to be either

apathetic or always grumbling. Bessie wrote to her friend Kate Salt that as treasurer she was fed up with members 'telling me we should have done this and that and oughtn't to have done the other'. This left her 'feeling out of sight of all the meaning & beauty of it'. But all that changed when Kate Salt's letter reminded her of the suffrage demonstration in London. Bessie claimed that the letter 'suddenly swept away the horrid, worn things ... those women's faces are beautiful – it was quite glorious to see them, they seemed to shine... No nothing can push it back ... women are stirring and rising up everywhere, it's like a great flood'.⁴⁶

Campaigning could be thankless and often boring. Isabella Ford frequently used the word 'tiresome' about meetings and the attitudes of audiences. She could not help Ramsay Macdonald when he asked her to translate at an international socialist meeting because she had to give 'tiresome' suffrage lectures in Cambridge and Croydon. After holding a series of meetings among weavers at dinner time she wrote to Millicent Fawcett that the younger 'girls are tiresome' and reviled her for speaking about votes, but the older ones were 'wild with enthusiasm'.⁴⁷ She experienced a rollercoaster of emotions in dealing with the labour movement, but in particular the ILP for which she had a deep emotional attachment. She recalled how it gave her 'immense pain' when in the early days socialists did not see the point of women's suffrage and 'felt so grieved' when MPs such as Phillip Snowden failed to turn up to the House of Commons to support a women's suffrage Bill.⁴⁸ Although the official position of the ILP was to support votes for women on the same terms as men, some members of the NAC appeared to take a more adult suffrage position in 1909. Isabella Ford, therefore, wrote to the *Labour Leader* that she might be compelled to leave the party 'for which we care so much'.⁴⁹ It was no doubt these strong feelings that kept her within the party until the crisis had been averted. She spoke of how 'our hearts are with the ILP' and her regrets that she could not fight for it as much as in previous years until 'our battle is won'.⁵⁰

This suggests that deep emotional attachments could play a part in explaining political decisions as much as a principled position based on rational arguments. Loyalty to the ILP was tested by the actions of some leading members, but then reinforced by the consistent support provided by others. Keir Hardie in particular was praised for his principled stand on women's suffrage.⁵¹ When she welcomed him back from a speaking tour, Isabella Ford 'spoke feelingly' of his 'loyal support' for the women's cause.⁵² She supported Hardie in her turn when he wrote an article for the *Common Cause* that had a sentence in it that supported militancy. The NUWSS refused to print it because he would not remove the sentence and so Isabella suggested that it should be published by the Women's Freedom Party and then the NUWSS could buy it from them.⁵³

Loyalty to the ILP was reinforced by strong personal friendships with other socialists who were also suffrage supporters. These could cross class boundaries. In one revealing letter to Selina Cooper, a working-class suffragist leader from Lancashire, Isabella Ford wrote that 'I would so like to be campaigning with you again—please don't be so disagreeable as to sign yourself "respectfully to me – or I must do it too & I feel "affecty" and not respectfully for I like you ... dear

Mrs Cooper. Please try and like me'.⁵⁴ Close friendships were also formed with male socialists and trade unionists. Ben Turner, leader of the Yorkshire Textile Workers' Union, claimed that 'she has been my guide, philosopher and friend'.⁵⁵ It is not surprising that the word she used most often to express such bonds was comradeship, and she also applied this, and similar terms, to close relationships formed in the suffrage movement. Writing to encourage suffrage campaigners to use a particular hotel where the landlady had been kind to suffragists who stayed there, she claimed that 'all we women suffragists, of all kinds, should stand by one another. The camaraderie of our movement is I think one of its finest features'.⁵⁶

It has often been noted that the suffrage movement was not just about gaining the vote. The campaign, in both its language and its practice, sought to define what it meant to be a 'political woman' and an active citizen within a democratic society.⁵⁷ There were many different approaches to this which can sometimes be overlooked if there is too much focus on militant or non-militant methods. Isabella Ford never wavered from the view that violence should not be used to deal with political and social problems, whether at home or abroad. Her emphasis on peace was deeply rooted in her Quaker background, but she also found her views to be compatible with the ILP which accommodated different strands of socialist thinking. In an early interview, when she attended an International trade union conference in France, she claimed that 'in England Socialism does not advocate violent means as it does in France'.⁵⁸ She did not accept the concept of a class war but was taken to task for her views by another leading ILP member, Dora Montefiore. They were both attending the Women's Suffrage Alliance congress at Amsterdam when a resolution was proposed that the congress should acknowledge class war as well as a sex war. Dora Montefiore was surprised to hear Isabella Ford claim that the ILP did not recognise and stand for the class war. When she tackled her about it Isabella referred her to Keir Hardie who was evasive and ambivalent in his reply.⁵⁹

For Dora Montefiore the class war was at the very heart of her socialist beliefs, but Isabella Ford was not alone in taking the stand that she did. In Bristol, for example, the ILP drew its inspiration from Christianity as much as from Marx.⁶⁰ The paid organiser, Walter Ayles and the middle-class Quaker Mabel Tothill, who was chair of the ILP after the First World War, both disliked the class struggle. Mabel Tothill suggested that class war was just as destructive as war between nations since 'although purely economic in character, [it] is both the cause and effect of profound bitterness'.⁶¹ They agreed with Isabella Ford that the ballot box was by far the most 'civilised' method of achieving change, which was why women's suffrage was so important.

On the other hand, non-violence did not mean being passive. After the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (IWSA) congress of 1909 Isabella Ford believed that the general drift of the movement was towards socialism and that's why the rich dreaded it. They 'have an uncomfortable feeling that we intend, as soon as we have votes, to turn everything upside down, though at the same time they are fond of calling us fussy, hysterical creatures'.⁶² In her article in the *Labour*

Leader she argued that this dread came from the fact that most women when they entered public life stood up against landlordism, sweating and voiced the claims of workers 'in a most troublesome fashion'. Isabella Ford did believe that women would bring something different to political life and would support temperance and moral laws as well as legislation to help the woman worker. Women's caring role within the family made them ideally suited to work for socialist aims, in particular for love and beauty, but this was not an essentialist view. She argued that for women to do this without 'a sickliness of sentiment' they needed political equality since only this would wipe out the view that 'women are naturally more angelic than men, and somehow possess more first-hand knowledge about heaven'.⁶³

Isabella argued that direct action was necessary when there was no other way to exert influence. She referred to the way men had had to employ such tactics in their struggle for the franchise, although she was not specific about which ones they had used. Isabella praised members of the WSPU who had gone to prison in 1906 since 'in the past, when men wanted their liberties they fought for them' and there was nothing they liked better than to read about 'the struggles for liberty made in the olden days'.⁶⁴ She was astute in predicting that 'in the days to come, the history of these women's agitation would be read with equal pleasure'. Carrying on with this theme in the following year, she regretted that she had never been to prison and had come to the conclusion that 'it was no use being nice and gentle; they must take the law into their own hands and behave as men behaved in 1831 when they wanted representation'.⁶⁵

She tried to rouse NUWSS members to greater action by reminding them that even the police had told the women that they must 'keep on pestering' and she urged them to fight for women's suffrage 'with all our strength'.⁶⁶ Her friend Mary Gawthorpe, a young socialist teacher and member of the Leeds WSS, who later joined the WSPU, urged that cautious, careful people who worried about their reputations 'can never bring about a reform'.⁶⁷ It is interesting that the language used often referred to 'fighting' or 'combat', but this clearly meant strength and persistence of purpose rather than violence and it was the vote, rather than armaments, that provided the 'weapon'. Isabella Ford could not, for example, condone the actions of the WSPU when they began to destroy property and like many other 'constitutionalists' worried that the whole movement would be associated with such methods. In 1914 she wrote to Millicent Fawcett that 'we live in terror now about Adel church and people will say we've done it'.⁶⁸ On the other hand she was careful not to be too critical in public. Indeed Katherine Bruce Glasier worried that Ramsay MacDonald's fierce criticism of the WSPU for their attacks on the labour movement would alienate Isabella Ford.⁶⁹ In the event, however, Isabella took the side of the ILP and feared any adverse publicity against the two movements of which she was a part. When suffragettes disrupted the ILP conference at Scarborough in 1914 she wrote to tell Millicent Fawcett that 'the women were put out with great care ... we all watched anxiously & the WSPU will lie when they say otherwise... You see they had to be put out. No speeches

were possible'.⁷⁰ As the achievement of women's suffrage seemed more likely after 1912 Isabella emphasised even further the importance of the ballot box for achieving change and believed that the vote was 'the onward march of civilisation'.⁷¹

Emotions were not just important for explaining Isabella Ford's own commitment to socialist and feminist politics. She also played on the emotions of her audiences in order to gain support. She used graphic descriptions of the work conditions of sweated workers and textile workers to rouse the sympathy of her audiences and to inspire them to work hard for the vote. Her speeches were reported as 'hitting home' because they were based on 'first-hand experience' and both men and women in the audience were 'deeply moved' and 'roused to action' by what she said. At one meeting members of the audience rose to thank her 'for rousing them to a desire to exert every effort to improve the conditions of women workers'.⁷² For working-class women and men she emphasised the importance of starting from every-day experiences to gain their support. She accepted that many working-class women were indifferent to the suffrage movement but thought that they could only be touched deeply 'if we understand their lives'.⁷³ Admitting that Labour men were by no means angels Isabella thought that they were unlikely to let women down because they understood the suffrage cause from the inside. 'Their understanding of us is not founded on mere second-hand knowledge gained through reading ... for it is their women who are affected by bad economic conditions ...'.⁷⁴

Isabella Ford was described as a 'witty speaker' who 'charmed her audiences'. She used humour to connect with a wide variety of groups and to lighten up her message. Krista Cowman has suggested that humour was a way in which speakers for the WSPU could subvert common stereotypes of women without resorting to anger and to explore a different way of engaging with political life.⁷⁵ The same points could be made for suffragists such as Isabella Ford. She was careful not to express anger publicly even when she would have liked to. She later recalled her 'internal fury' when Asquith insulted a deputation that she was part of but in her speeches and journalism she undermined him with humour.⁷⁶ For example, she expressed the hope that some of the delegates from the IWSA meeting in 1908 would come to the demonstration planned in London on 21 June since 'it will terrify Asquith to see women members from Finland'. This was because the Upper Chamber in that country had been abolished 'largely, I am told, through the action of the women's vote'.⁷⁷ Her wit and charm seem to have been used to good effect. The *Common Cause* described her as 'the raciest speaker in the National Union ... the friend of every sweated worker in England'. The paper claimed that she spoke 'with equal success to an audience of 5,000 workmen or 25 clergymen – they laugh and weep as she chooses, and they all love her'.⁷⁸ Trying to maintain her reputation as a lively and humorous speaker, however, took its toll on Isabella. She confided in Helena Swanwick that 'they will expect me to be funny and it's not always easy'.⁷⁹

It has been suggested that humour could be used to strengthen the bonds between suffrage activists, to help them get through difficult times and as a release of tensions.⁸⁰ Isabella often took part in debates at suffrage meetings in which she took the role of an anti-suffragist. She invariably played her part with humour. Mary Fielden reported on one such occasion when Isabella was touring with the suffrage caravan in Yorkshire. She appeared at one meeting as Miss Ford-Cromer who 'at great personal sacrifice' was willing to put her scruples to one side to appear on a public platform 'as a protest against the present unwomanly behaviour of some of her sex'. She seemed unable to remember her opponent's name, 'a misfortune from which, I believe, some Anti-suffrage great ladies suffer', and tended to applaud suffrage arguments. When the resolution in favour of women's suffrage was put to the vote it was carried 'amid great applause, Miss Ford-Cromer's *two hands* being the only dissentient ones'.⁸¹ At a similar meeting, when an animated discussion followed the debate, 'here alas! Miss IO Ford had the novel experience of failing to answer questions ... she made a charming apology and explained that the Anti-Suffragists did not always allow questions at their meetings'.⁸² Mary Fielden recommended this form of debate as a way to raise funds, but it could also make meetings more enjoyable for those already committed to the cause. It provided suffragists with a method of conducting their politics which undermined the arguments of opponents. They gained strength from working together for a cause that they believed was just and not from one in which they viewed themselves as downtrodden and suffering.

Conclusion

This chapter has taken one socialist and suffrage campaigner, Isabella Ford, to explore the importance of emotions in understanding the attraction of women to political activism and for explaining their long-term commitment to the causes that they held dear. It has not focused on the specific influence that she had on both movements but has attempted, instead, to suggest that politics were about more than specific debates about tactics and methods but were also about feelings and emotional commitment. This could contribute to women becoming and remaining political activists. The feelings, and the way they were expressed, were not a-historical. They were affected by external events which could generate specific emotions and also provide a language in which they could be framed. The conviction that there was growing support for their movement and that its achievement was not far off gave suffragists a new strength of purpose as they developed their views about the characteristics of the new political woman. These could be complex and contradictory. The traits often attributed to women because of their role within the family, of caring and compassion, were used in a positive way to argue their case for the vote, but women were also seen as resolute and willing to fight for change. For Isabella Ford, for example, women of the ILP were not made of 'submissive, door-mat material' and therefore had a more 'wholesome' and equal relationship with the men.⁸³

Isabella Ford was herself often identified by her contemporaries with specific emotions that explained her political activism. Adjectives most often used to characterise her were ‘keen pity’ for all suffering creatures, ‘a burning desire to be of service to others’ and ‘gentleness’ in her anxiety ‘not to give pain to either men or beasts’.⁸⁴ A sense of service to others, in which the self was subsumed within a cause, was a common way to represent women in the labour movement, in particular those from a middle class background. Margaret Bondfield expressed this well at the time of Isabella’s death. ‘Her personality and extraordinary sympathy and humility made themselves felt always. Forgetting herself entirely in the morass of suffering, she as it were lost her life for some years to find it more abundantly’.⁸⁵ But this was only one part of the story. Isabella Ford’s political activism also provided a space for her to develop her sense of self and personal fulfilment. Katharine Bruce Glasier recognised this in her portrait of the two sisters when they were young women. Bessie had spinal problems and so ‘Isabella, breathing health and vigour in every tone of voice and movement ... “shot every arrow of desire” that Bessie found in her generous heart; charged every enemy of the cause; challenged each new obstacle’.⁸⁶

It would also be a mistake to overlook the pleasure, joy and excitement that came from working for socialism and for suffrage in those heady years of the early 20th century. Lucy Middleton, a socialist activist of a younger generation, looking back on her career, noted that it was a pity that ‘the joy of comradeship of those early years is not as tellingly depicted as are the quarrels’.⁸⁷ Isabella Ford’s speeches and letters, in particular in the period before the First World War, are full of expressions of joy – about the possibility of suffrage being won and of the close friendships that had sustained her in times of difficulty. She took two working women, who had saved up for the trip, to Lucerne for a week in 1911 and said ‘I never had a nicer time ... we enjoyed every minute, every second of our time’.⁸⁸ Her house, Adel Grange, was always full of friends and stimulating conversations. It was ‘used for conferences and committee meetings in connection with women’s suffrage and labour politics, and it was a hive of progressive activity’.⁸⁹ She summed up her own feelings about her life in a letter that she wrote to Millicent, Agnes and Philippa Fawcett when she was about to leave Adel Grange and move into a smaller cottage. She said ‘any small help we may have been to anyone or, more than us, what our mother did, was pure enjoyment to us – we delighted in having such nice people here & those who weren’t nice are an endless source of amusement to us. It has been such a nice life for us’⁹⁰

Notes

- 1 Isabella Ford to Edward Carpenter, August 25, 1913, Carpenter Collection, Sheffield Reference Library.
- 2 One of the best accounts of “new life” socialism is Sheila Rowbotham and Jeffrey Weeks, *Socialism and the New Life: The Personal and Sexual Politics of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis* (London: Pluto, 1977).

- 3 For example, see the conference “Women’s suffrage and political activism,” Murray Edwards College, Cambridge, February 3, 1918; “More than just the Pankhursts: the wider suffrage movement,” Working-Class Movement Library, November 3, 2018.
- 4 Hilda Kean, “Searching for the Present in Past Defeat: The Construction of Historical and Political Identity in British Feminism in the 1920s and 30s,” *Women’s History Review*, 3, 1 (1994): 57–80; Laura E. Nym Mayhall, “Creating the Suffragette Spirit: British Feminism and the Historical Imagination,” *Women’s History Review*, 4, 3 (1995): 319–44.
- 5 June Hannam, *Isabella Ford, 1855–1924* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989). For a discussion of Isabella Ford in the context of Yorkshire, see Jill Liddington, *Rebel Girls: Their Fight for the Vote* (London: Virago, 2006).
- 6 For the best accounts of the alliance, see Sandra Stanley Holton, *Feminism and Democracy: Women’s Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain, 1900–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) and Jo Vellacott, *Pacifists, Patriots and the Vote: The Erosion of Democratic Suffragism in Britain during the First World War* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).
- 7 For a discussion of those approaches, see Hannam, *Isabella Ford*, Introduction.
- 8 There have been new biographies of the well-known leaders, for example, see June Purvis, *Emmeline Pankhurst: A Biography* (London: Routledge, 2013) and Christabel Pankhurst: *A Biography* (London: Routledge, 2018); Lyndsey Jenkins, *Lady Constance Lytton: Aristocrat, Suffragette, Martyr* (London: Biteback, 2015). There are others that explore the lives of women in the provinces. For example, see R Edlin-White, *Spinster of No Occupation? Mary Ellen Shaw: 1859–1926* (Nottingham: Smallprint, 2007); Liddington, *Rebel Girls*. Many local studies approach the topic through key activists: Sue Jones, *Votes for Women. Cheltenham and the Cotswolds* (Stroud: The History Press, 2018). The significance of women artists is explored in Elizabeth Crawford, *Art and Suffrage: A Biographical Dictionary of Suffrage Artists* (London: Francis Boutle, 2018).
- 9 Sandra Stanley Holton, “Challenging Masculinism: Personal History and Micro History in Feminist Studies of the Women’s Suffrage Movement,” *Women’s History Review*, 20, 5 (2011): 829–41.
- 10 Jeff Godwin, James Jasper and Francesca Polletta, “Introduction: Why Emotions Matter,” in Jeff Godwin, James Jasper and Francesca Polletta eds., *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 1.
- 11 Michael Roper, “Slipping Out of View: Subjectivity and Emotion in Gender History,” *History Workshop Journal*, 59, 1 (2005): 57–72.
- 12 Martin Francis, “Tears, Tantrums and Bared Teeth: The Emotional Economy of Three Conservative Prime Ministers, 1951–63,” *Journal of British Studies*, 41, 3 (2002): 354–87.
- 13 Obituary in *The Friend*, 64 (1924), 670.
- 14 Christina Florin, “Heightened Feelings! Emotions as ‘Capital’ in the Swedish Suffrage Movement,” *Women’s History Review*, 18, 2 (2009): 191, 181–201.
- 15 J. J. Mallon, “The Portrait Gallery: Miss Isabella Ford,” *The Woman Worker*, August 7, 1908, 251. Katharine Bruce Glasier, ‘Isabella O Ford’, *Bradford Pioneer*, July 1924.
- 16 Mallon, “The Portrait Gallery,” 251. Glasier, “Isabella O Ford.”
- 17 E.S. Ford, “I.O.Ford,” typescript, MSS 371/3, Ford Family Papers, Brotherton Library, Leeds.
- 18 Ann Heilmann, *New Woman Fiction. Women Writing First-Wave Feminism* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 2000).
- 19 Glasier, ‘Isabella O. Ford’.
- 20 Hannam, *Isabella Ford*, 32.
- 21 Gerry Holloway, *Women and Work in Britain since 1840* (London: Routledge, 2005), chap. 4.
- 22 “Some Eminent Trade Unionists no. 8: Miss Isabella Ford,” *Leeds Weekly Citizen*, June 12, 1914.
- 23 Mallon, “The Portrait Gallery.”

- 24 Ford, "I. O. Ford."
- 25 *Western Mail*, May 31, 1893.
- 26 *Western Mail*, May 31, 1893.
- 27 I. O. Ford, *On the Threshold* (London: Edward Arnold, 1895). Chris Waters, "New Women and Socialist-Feminist Fiction: The Novels of Isabella Ford and Katharine Bruce Glasier" in *Discovering Forgotten Radicals: British Women Writers, 1859–1939* eds., Angela Ingram and Daphne Patai (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).
- 28 *Labour Leader*, April 12, 1907.
- 29 I.O. Ford, "Why Women Should Be Socialists," *Labour Leader*, May 1, 1913, 10.
- 30 Isabella O Ford, "Why I Joined the ILP," in *Why I Joined the Independent Labour Party: Some Plain Statements*, ed. Joseph Clayton (Leeds: ILP, c. 1897), 5.
- 31 Ford, "Why Women Should Be Socialists."
- 32 *Labour Leader*, February 8, 1907.
- 33 Isabella O. Ford, "The Lessons of the Women's International Conference," *Labour Leader*, July 2, 1909.
- 34 I.O. Ford, "Manhood Suffrage: Equal Suffrage. A Personal Testimony," *Common Cause*, September 19, 1912.
- 35 Examples of the wide variety of meetings that she addressed are in the *Labour Leader* and the *Common Cause*.
- 36 "Women Workers: How the Vote Would Improve Their Position: A Speech by Councillor Margaret Ashton at Twerton," *Bath Chronicle*, August 11, 1910; Maude Royden, *Votes and Wages: How Women's Suffrage Will Improve the Economic Position of Women* (London: NUWSS, 1911).
- 37 *Common Cause*, August 5, 1909.
- 38 *Leeds Mercury*, February 25, 1913.
- 39 Florin, "Heightened Feelings," 181.
- 40 Isabella O Ford, "Exeter Hall and Trafalgar Square," *Labour Leader*, May 25, 1906.
- 41 I.O.F. "Women's Votes: Conference of MPs," *Labour Leader*, February 23, 1906.
- 42 *Labour Leader*, June 26, 1908.
- 43 Isabella O. Ford, "The Lessons of the Women's International Conference," *Labour Leader*, July 2, 1909.
- 44 Isabella Ford to Millicent Fawcett, January 14, 1906, Suffrage MSS, Manchester Reference Library; Isabella Ford to Miss Strachey, August 1910, Carpenter Collection.
- 45 I.O. Ford, "Manhood Suffrage".
- 46 Bessie Ford to Kate Salt, June 15, 1908, Carpenter Collection.
- 47 Letter to Millicent Fawcett, January 14, 1906, Manchester Reference Library.
- 48 Letter to Selina Cooper, February 17, 1906, Manchester Reference Library.
- 49 *Labour Leader*, November 5, 1909.
- 50 *Labour Leader*, July 2, 1909. She was one of the very few candidates for the executive committee of the NUWSS who in 1912 put down a political party on the form and that was the ILP.
- 51 *Labour Leader*, February 8, 1907.
- 52 *Labour Leader*, April 10, 1908.
- 53 Letter Isabella Ford to Francis Johnson, August 1908, Francis Johnson Collection, London School of Economics (LSE).
- 54 Letter to Selina Cooper, February 17, 1906.
- 55 *Yorkshire Factory Times*, May 29, 1912.
- 56 *Common Cause*, August 5, 1909.
- 57 Laura E. Nym Mayhall, *The Militant Suffrage Movement. Citizenship and Resistance in Britain, 1860–1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women. Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign, 1907–1914* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997).
- 58 *Leeds Mercury*, August 20, 1897. A reprint of an interview in the *Journal de Roubaix*.

- 59 These views were expressed in a series of letters between Dora Montefiore and Keir Hardie in *Justice*, August 8, 1908.
- 60 June Hannam, *Mabel Tothill: Feminist, Socialist, Pacifist* (Bristol: Bristol Radical Pamphleteer no. 45, 2019).
- 61 M.C. Tothill, "War and the Social Order", *The Friend*, October 9, 1914.
- 62 *Labour Leader*, July 2, 1909.
- 63 *Labour Leader*, May 1, 1913.
- 64 *Cambridge Independent Press*, July 20, 1906.
- 65 *Leeds Mercury*, November 21, 1907.
- 66 *Labour Leader*, November 9, 1906.
- 67 *Labour Leader*, December 15, 1905.
- 68 Isabella Ford to Millicent Fawcett Autumn 1914, Correspondence Files, Women's Library, LSE.
- 69 Holton, *Feminism and Democracy*, 243.
- 70 Isabella Ford to Millicent Fawcett, April 14, 1914, LSE.
- 71 *Leeds Weekly Citizen*, May 30, 1913.
- 72 *Common Cause*, September 26, 1912.
- 73 *Common Cause*, April 25, 1913.
- 74 Ford, "Manhood Suffrage".
- 75 Krista Cowman, "'Doing Something Silly': The Uses of Humour by the Women's Social and Political Union, 1903–1914," *International Review of Social History*, 52 (2007): 259–74.
- 76 Isabella Ford letter to Millicent Fawcett, Autumn 1919, LSE.
- 77 *Labour Leader*, June 26, 1908.
- 78 "Miners and Suffragists at Scarborough," *Common Cause*, October 3, 1913.
- 79 *Woman's Leader*, August 1, 1924.
- 80 Cowman, "Doing Something Silly," 272–73; Florin, "Heightened Feelings," 188.
- 81 Mary Fielden, "The Yorkshire Caravan," *Common Cause*, August 5, 1909.
- 82 *Common Cause*, September 1, 1910.
- 83 *Common Cause*, September 19, 1912.
- 84 For example, see obituaries by Ben Turner, *Yorkshire Factory Times*, July 24, 1924; John Arnott, *Leeds Weekly Citizen*, July 19, 1924; *Woman's Leader*, August 1, 1924. Also, interview with Isabella Ford, *Leeds Weekly Citizen*, June 12, 1914.
- 85 *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, July 29, 1924.
- 86 Glasier, "Isabella O. Ford."
- 87 *Labour Woman*, July 1971.
- 88 Isabella Ford to Edward Carpenter, September 17, 1911.
- 89 Elizabeth Crossley, "Isabella O. Ford," *Leeds Weekly Citizen*, June 28, 1929.
- 90 Isabella Ford to Millicent, Agnes and Philippa Fawcett, December 21, 1921, quoted in Hannam, *Isabella Ford*, 198.

20 Epilogue: The Vote, and After

Prior to 1906, votes for women had been regarded by many supposedly suffragist MPs as a hardy perennial to which support in principle might safely be given without further commitment being implied. Between 1906 and 1910, the suffragettes had succeeded in bringing the Commons to cease regarding votes for women as a provider of more or less yearly occasions for jocular remarks and desultory debate – by 1910, women's claim to the vote was no longer of marginal interest to male politicians. The forming of the Conciliation Committee in that year particularly attested to the efficacy of militancy – in 1905, the forming of a committee with such a name and purpose would have been as inconceivable as it was unnecessary.

An equally direct connection cannot be drawn between the arson campaign of 1912–14 and the granting of the vote to women over thirty on 6 February 1918. War carried in its train such rapid social and political change that by 1917 the issue of women's enfranchisement appeared in a context fundamentally dissimilar to that of pre-war days. An exhaustive consideration of the many factors which led to the surprisingly easy passage of women's suffrage legislation through the Commons in 1917 must remain beyond the purview of this work. Yet to examine feminist militancy in the pre-war years without making at least a brief inquiry into the relationship between that militancy and the granting of the vote in 1918 would be to fail to evaluate fully the ultimate effectiveness of the suffragettes' efforts.

A substantial array of war-wrought factors would have helped to further the cause of women's enfranchisement whether castles, railway stations, piers, and cricket pavilions had gone up in smoke or not. As men left jobs to fight overseas, they were replaced by women. Women also filled many jobs brought into existence by war-time needs, and the net result was that the number of women employed rose from 3,224,600 in July 1914

to 4,814,600 by January 1918.¹ The rise in employment was to prove temporary – by 1921, the number of women employed had dropped to pre-war levels – but this fall was not foreseen during the war, when it was clear only that some ‘adjustment’ would be necessary when hostilities ended. Anyway, during the war years by far the most extensive publicity was given not to the sheer number of women employed, but to the fact that women were doing *kinds* of work they had not done before. In July 1914 only 1,500 women were employed by banks, but by April 1918 banks employed 37,600 women.² During the same period, the number of women employed by tramway and omnibus companies increased from 1,700 to 28,900.³ There had been few women bank clerks and no women bus conductors before the war, and the women who now flocked to these highly visible occupations received much praise. Also well-publicized was women’s taking up of jobs requiring heavy labour, such as barrowing coke into railway vans, rolling barrels at breweries, stoking furnaces, unloading coal wagons, and building ships. In September 1916, the War Office claimed that women had ‘shown themselves capable of replacing the stronger sex in practically every calling’.⁴ The greatest adulation was reserved, however, for women who took part in the extremely hazardous munitions industry, in which one explosion alone caused the death of twenty-four women. By April 1918, 701,000 women were employed in munitions (including ship-building), and over 60 per cent of the workers in shell-making were women.⁵

The glowing praise given to women’s work on the home front, to women nurses and doctors on the continent, and to heroic individual women such as the martyred Nurse Edith Cavell fostered a marked change in male attitudes towards women’s enfranchisement. On 4 May 1916, Mrs Fawcett wrote to Asquith:⁶

A very general rumour has prevailed since last autumn . . . that the Government will, before the end of the war, find it necessary to deal with the franchise question in order to prevent the hardship and injustice which would arise if men who have been serving their country abroad, or in munitions areas in parts of this country other than those where they usually reside, should in consequence of their

patriotic service be penalised by losing their votes.

When the Government deals with the Franchise . . . we trust that you may include in your Bill clauses which would remove the disabilities under which women labour. An Agreed Bill on these lines would . . . receive a very wide measure of support throughout the country. Our movement has received very great accessions of strength during recent months, former opponents now declaring themselves on our side, or, at any rate, withdrawing their opposition. The change of tone in the Press is most marked.

These changes are mainly consequent on the changed industrial and professional status of women.

On 7 May, Asquith replied:⁷

I need not assure you how deeply my colleagues and I recognize and appreciate the magnificent contribution which the women of the United Kingdom have made to the maintenance of our country's cause.

No such legislation as you refer to is at present in contemplation; but if, and when it should become necessary to undertake it, you may be certain that the considerations set out in your letter will be fully and impartially weighed, without any prejudgement from the controversies of the past.

It is his letter of 7 May 1916, rather than the interview of 20 June 1914, the importance of which was later so overestimated by Sylvia Pankhurst and George Dangerfield, that marked the first step on Asquith's road to Damascus.

Although Asquith had stated in his letter of 7 May to Mrs Fawcett that new legislation was not being contemplated, by July 1916 the Cabinet had become much concerned with the case for revision of the franchise. Existing law required men qualified as householders to have occupied a dwelling for at least one year prior to the 15 July preceding an election, so an enormous number of men who were either serving abroad in the armed forces or had changed their residences to take up war work in new locales had been inadvertently disenfranchised. In the early summer there was considerable indecisiveness on the part of the Government as to what to do about the situation. On

16 July, Asquith announced that the Government would set up a Select Committee to consider registration and franchise, but on 19 July the motion was withdrawn for lack of support. The Government still intended to introduce legislation of some kind, and on 4 August, representatives of fourteen constitutional suffrage societies, including the NUWSS and the United Suffragists, sent Asquith a letter stating that if the Government limited its intentions to ensuring that men previously on the register were not disqualified because of absence on war service, then suffragists would not oppose the legislation; if, however, new qualifications or changes in the period of residence were to add new names to the register, then suffragists would not stand aside – if qualifications based on war service were to be introduced, then women's claims could not be ignored. After the war, the problem of the 'readjustment' of men's and women's labour would have to be faced, and the large number of women who had entered skilled occupations during the war had a right to some say in the matter.⁸

With the advent of the Coalition, the balance between suffragists and 'antis' in the Cabinet had changed significantly, as Balfour, Bonar Law, Lord Robert Cecil, and Lord Selborne, all suffragists, became Cabinet Ministers, and Lord Lytton became a Junior Minister. Arthur Henderson, also a suffragist, entered the Cabinet on 18 August 1916. In early August, Henderson, Lord Robert Cecil, and Lloyd George gave their support to the position adopted by the fourteen women's organizations on 4 August. Then on 13 August, J. L. Garvin of the *Observer*, long an 'anti', announced his conversion to adult suffrage.⁹ On the following day, in the Commons, Asquith gave an awkwardly constructed speech in which, in the course of speaking *against* any attempt at large scale revision of the franchise while the war was still on (as opposed to simply reregistering those previously qualified), he said:¹⁰

the moment you begin a general enfranchisement on these lines of State service, you are brought face to face with another most formidable proposition: What are you to do with the women? . . . I have no special desire or predisposition to bring women within the pale of the franchise, but I have received a great many representations

from those who are authorized to speak for them, and I am bound to say that they presented to me not only a reasonable, but, I think, from their point of view, an unanswerable case. They say they are perfectly content, if we do not change the qualification of the franchise, to abide by the existing state of things, but that if we are going to bring in a new class of electors, on whatever ground of State service, they point out – and we cannot possibly deny their claim – that during this War the women of this country have rendered as effective service in the prosecution of the War as any other class of the community . . . they fill our munition factories, they are doing the work which the men who are fighting had to perform before . . . they are the servants of the State, and they have aided, in the most effective way, in the prosecution of the War. What is more, and this is a point which makes a special appeal to me, they say when the War comes to an end, and when . . . the process of industrial reconstruction has to be set on foot, have not the women a special claim to be heard on the many questions which will arise directly affecting their interests, and possibly meaning for them large displacements of labour? I cannot think that the House will deny that, and I say quite frankly that I cannot deny that claim. It seems to me . . . that nothing could be more injurious to the best interests of the country . . . than that the floodgates should be opened on all those vast complicated questions of the franchise . . . at this stage of the War. . . .

In a strangely convoluted argument, Asquith had declared *both* his support for women's enfranchisement after the war and his opposition to its consideration for the duration of the war. In taking this position, he had cast aside his most basic objections to women's suffrage. By referring to the various suffrage societies as 'those who are authorized to speak for them', he had conveniently forgotten the argument to which he had clung for so many years, that women's suffrage societies did not necessarily represent the wishes of the majority of women. And his equally long-held tenet, that voting would injure women's character by leading to a change in their social role, was obviously irrelevant

to the war-wrought employment of almost two million previously unemployed women; whether Asquith liked it or not, women's role appeared to be changing rapidly, and doing so in the full glare of super-heated war-time publicity. Asquith was willing to acknowledge the facts of a situation which he could hardly ignore.

Curiously enough, what was left of the WSPU (it did not become the Women's Party until 2 November 1917) at first rejected Asquith's conversion, not on the grounds that Asquith had failed to go far enough, but on the grounds that soldiers and sailors should be given the vote without the issue of women's suffrage being allowed to interfere. On 15 August 1916, Mrs Pankhurst accused Asquith of using votes for women as¹¹

an excuse for disenfranchising the Sailors and Soldiers, who he appears to think would vote against him and put some other man at the head of the Nation's affairs. . . .

Mr. Asquith insults as well as injures women when he tries to use them as catspaws to prevent the best men of the country from recording a vote, while any and every crank, coward or traitor, is to be free to vote as usual.

Thus, the WSPU at first opposed the very justification for women's enfranchisement which was to prove to be the key factor in that enfranchisement being obtained. History is not without its ironies! Fortunately for the women's cause, by the summer of 1916 the WSPU carried little weight in suffrage circles, and its opposition proved to be short-lived anyway.

On 16 August, the same day that the WSPU's indignant rejection of Asquith's conversion was announced in the Commons by Commander C. W. Bellairs, Walter Long, the president of the Local Government Board, suggested that a 'representative Conference' be set up to consider all aspects of electoral reform.¹² Long's proposal appeared to provide a way out of a Parliamentary impasse, and was subsequently accepted. On 18 August, Long suggested to Asquith that, in addition to members of all parties from both houses of Parliament, the proposed conference should include 'Representatives of Women's Societies – for and against Suffrage',¹³ but this suggestion was not taken up. On 26 September, Asquith wrote to the Speaker of the Commons, J. W. Lowther, asking him to chair the conference. Lowther

accepted, albeit with no great enthusiasm, being in 'fear that the number and complexity of the issues, which will be raised as we proceed, will overwhelm us'.¹⁴ In selecting the thirty-two members of the Conference on Electoral Reform, Lowther attempted to make the membership 'as nearly as possible proportionate to the strength of pre-war parties in the House of Commons.'¹⁵ There were thirteen Conservatives, twelve Liberals, four Irish Nationalists, and three Labourites in the conference as it was originally constituted. Lowther also stated that on the question of women's suffrage he 'endeavoured to obtain an equal division of opinion, so far as it could be ascertained'.¹⁶

The conference held its first meeting on 12 October 1916, and its last on 26 January 1917. Its proceedings were secret. Women's suffrage was made the last item on the agenda, and was not decided on until after 10 January; Lowther later wrote:¹⁷

I endeavoured to push off the burning question of women's suffrage as long as I could, and succeeded, for I felt that if we could agree upon other matters . . . there might be a greater disposition to come to some satisfactory solution on the women's question.

The postponement of consideration of women's suffrage until mid-January turned out to be propitious, for during December two events occurred which strengthened the women's chances: first, on 9 December, Asquith resigned and Lloyd George became Prime Minister. The fortunes of war and politics had finally removed the suffragists' erstwhile foe, who, while recently converted to women's suffrage in principle, had not as yet declared his support for women being granted the vote in war-time. Second, the women's cause was also aided when, on 14 December, Sir Frederick Banbury and Lord Salisbury, both 'antis', resigned as members of the conference, and were replaced by G. A. Touche and Lord Wortley, both of whom were suffragists.

The Conference on Electoral Reform issued its report on 27 January 1917. The conference recommended unanimously that the qualifying period be reduced to six months, that the franchise be extended to anyone resident in any premises during the qualifying period, and that soldiers and sailors who

normally resided in an area be permitted to vote. The conference also recommended, by a majority of unstated proportions, that some measure of woman suffrage be conferred.¹⁸ Mrs Fawcett wrote that, 'The majority for W.S. [Women's Suffrage] was said to be large although the Conference as originally constituted was equally divided. The majority reflects recent conversions.'¹⁹

The conference's specific recommendation regarding women's suffrage was that unmarried women on the Local Government Register and the wives of men on the Register should be entitled to vote, but only at a specified age. Various ages had been discussed, with thirty and thirty-five receiving the most favour. The age qualification had been proposed to avoid the sudden establishment of an absolute female majority in the electorate, it being unclear what electoral effects, if any, women's voting would have.

After the conference's report was published, Asquith abandoned any lingering reservations – he was no longer in a position to block legislation anyway – and agreed to move, on 28 March, a resolution calling for a Bill along the lines of the report. On 26 March, the War Cabinet recommended that the Commons adopt the report, but that any amendments regarding women's suffrage be left to a decision by the members of Parliament, without the imposition of Whips.²⁰ Two days later, the speech with which Asquith opened the Commons debate on the Report marked the final collapse of any serious opposition to women's suffrage.²¹

I think that some years ago I ventured to use the expression, 'Let the women work out their own salvation.' Well, Sir, they have worked it out during this War. How could we have carried on the War without them? Short of actually bearing arms in the field, there is hardly a service which has contributed, or is contributing, to the maintenance of our cause in which women have not been at least as active and as efficient as men, and wherever we turn we see them doing . . . work which three years ago would have been regarded as falling exclusively within the province of men. . . . But what I confess moves me still more in this matter is the problem of reconstruction when the War is over. The questions which will then necessarily arise in

regard to women's labour and women's functions and activities in the new ordering of things – for, do not doubt it, the old order will be changed – are questions in regard to which I, for my part, feel it impossible, consistently either with justice or with expediency, to withhold from women the power and right of making their voice directly heard. And let me add that, since the War began, now nearly three years ago, we have had no recurrence of that detestable campaign which disfigured the annals of political agitation in this country, and no one can now contend that we are yielding to violence what we refused to concede to argument. I, therefore, believe, and I believe many others who have hitherto thought with me in this matter, are prepared to acquiesce in the general decision of the majority of the Conference, that some measure of women's suffrage should be conferred.

Asquith's arguments were by no means atypical of the apologies now tendered in both Houses, where steadfast suffragists and recent converts alike repeated, again and again, that women had earned the vote by their work for the war. Lloyd George said: 'There is no doubt that the War has had an enormous effect upon public opinion as far as this question is concerned. . . . Women's work in the War has been a vital contribution to our success.'²² A. C. Morton stated that 'opinion outside, if not inside, this House is largely changing in favour of giving women a vote as soon as possible, and no doubt that is largely owing to the excellent work which they have done for us and for the country during the War'.²³ There is no need for further examples, though many more could be given.

Asquith's speech was also something of a paradigm in that in the arguments of several other men fulsome praise of women's war work was also discreetly buttressed by words which seemed to suggest that before the war there had been a 'detestable campaign', that it would be desirable to avoid the recrudescence of pre-war quarrels after the war, and that at this time, when there could be no appearance of giving in to a horde of maenads, it would be expedient to give women the vote. J. R. Clynes said,²⁴

a period of compromise is, after all, possible to us in this

country, that while War is being waged in other lands we here, in . . . a state of peace, can use that condition . . . to settle on lines of compromise those highly controversial questions . . . whether you admit the right or not, women will persist actively to clamour for their rights until those claims are met.

Walter Long, an erstwhile 'anti', warned against 'a renewal of those bitter controversies over which we have wasted so much time in the past'.²⁵ And Bonar Law said:²⁶

since the War began they have refrained from the kind of agitation which alienated people from their cause. . . . They have said, 'So long as there is no extension of the franchise to men for new qualifications we will say nothing, but the moment there is an extension of the kind we will fight for ours.' . . . There really is the problem, as I see it, in a nutshell. You cannot avoid this controversy. I wish you could. You have got to have it anyway.

Such arguments were later to be amplified in stronger terms in the House of Lords, by the Marquess of Crewe:²⁷

The atmosphere after the conclusion of the war . . . cannot be in the political sense calm. It may be very much the contrary. A great number of questions exciting controversial feelings among all Parties will emerge suddenly, will rise to the surface . . . without any of the patriotic checks which all men, however keen their desires, wish to apply to political discussion at this moment. I therefore venture to ask those who believe that the consideration of this question could properly be postponed, what advantages can be expected from its postponement?

I recall the political position on this subject as it existed just before the war. We all know how high feelings ran . . . it would have been no surprise to us, the members of the Government of that day, if any one of our colleagues in the House of Commons who had taken a prominent line either for or against the grant of the vote to women had been assassinated in the street. . . . It is quite true that the various leaders of the women's party had drawn the line at murder, although they did not draw it at any other kind of

outrage. . . . But we all know that every period of political agitation is liable to have its Invincible wing, and nobody was certain that some enthusiastic supporters of the movement might not take the life, either of one of the Ministers who declared himself in strong opposition to the Bill, or of one of those who was known to be strongly in favour of it, on the ground that he was acting as a traitor in remaining a member of the Government which refused the vote. That is an atmosphere, if the grant of the vote is refused, which will undoubtedly be recreated, one of these days.

On the evening of 28 March 1917, after a debate remarkably lacking in acrimony, the Commons approved the introduction of legislation based on the report of the Electoral Conference, by an overwhelming majority of 541 to 62.* This division marked the real turning point in the Parliamentary progress of women's suffrage – thereafter, the outcome was never seriously in doubt. Just as before the war the passage of women's suffrage legislation had been blocked by a combination of factors – the Liberals' fear of too 'narrow' a franchise, the Tories' fear of too 'broad' a franchise, Asquith's Premiership, and the desire of the Irish Nationalists to keep him in office – so, now, a number of war-wrought factors – the decreased importance of party divisions under the Coalition, the remarkably lessened fear of adult suffrage, the entry into the Government of several conspicuously fervid suffragists, the replacement of Asquith by Lloyd George, the strongly-felt need for a revision of electoral qualifications affecting soldiers and sailors, admiration for women's war work and war heroism, *and* a general desire to avoid the renewal of pre-war conflicts after the war – *combined* to create a political climate highly favourable to the enfranchisement of women. Before the war, feminist militancy had succeeded in making women's enfranchisement a political issue of considerable importance. During the war, given that the importance of the issue was *already* well-established, the suspension of militancy enabled male politicians to sponsor women's enfranchisement

* *H.C. Deb.* 5s. vol. 92, 28 March 1917, cc. 566–70. Commander C. W. Bellairs, who had acted as the WSPU's spokesman the previous August, voted against the Resolution.

without seeming to look 'weak and ridiculous if they yielded to this agitation.'*

By 19 June 1917, when the Commons considered the Committee stage of Clause Four of the Representation of the People Bill, Ramsay MacDonald could remark that the matter had 'already been fought and won.'²⁸ The clause passed by a vote of 385 to 55. In the Lords, Lord Curzon, President of the Anti-Suffrage League, admitted defeat on 10 January 1918, and that evening the clause passed the Lords by a vote of 134 to 71. The Representation of the People Act received the Royal Assent on 6 February 1918. Under the terms of the Act, enfranchisement was conferred on women over thirty who were householders, the wives of householders, occupiers of property of £5 or more annual value, or university graduates. Limiting the franchise to women over thirty proved effective in achieving the end of avoiding the immediate establishment of a female majority in the electorate, for in the first register of Parliamentary electors under the 1918 Act, 12,913,166 men and 8,479,156 women were listed.²⁹

As has been mentioned, on 2 November 1917, by which time it was clear that women would soon receive the vote, the WSPU had been renamed 'The Women's Party'. Mrs Pankhurst became the new party's treasurer, Annie Kenney was Secretary, Mrs Drummond was Chief Organizer, and Christabel continued to edit *Britannia*, which became the party's official organ. On its founding, the Women's Party published a programme, 'For the war and after', largely written by Christabel.³⁰ The programme combined a foreign policy based on acute xenophobia with a domestic policy which included proposals for widespread reforms affecting women and children. In foreign affairs, the Women's Party advocated 'war till victory', followed by 'reduction of Germany's mineral and other war-like resources' to the point that Germany would find it impossible to wage war again, 'ridding all Government Departments of officials having enemy blood or connections, and of all officials who have pacifist and pro-German leanings', opposition to surrender of the authority of Parliament in international politics to 'any so-

* *Westminster Gazette*, 29 March 1912 (see p. 162).

called League or Council of Nations', keeping the natural resources and transport systems of Britain and the Empire 'under strictly British ownership and control', and the exclusive manning of the British public service 'by officials of long British descent and wholly British connection'. Under the rubric 'Special women's questions', the Women's Party advocated equal opportunity of employment, equal pay for equal work, equal marriage laws including equal conditions of divorce, and a raising of the age of consent. The 'community' was to 'guarantee to the expectant and nursing mother the food and other conditions required to enable the bearing and rearing of healthy children', and every child was to be 'guaranteed by the community from birth until it becomes a fully grown and self-supporting member of society the material conditions of life, the medical supervision and treatment, and the general education followed by specialized education, necessary to make the child a worthy citizen.' In addition, 'over-work and undefined hours of labour, which constitute the special burdens of the married woman', were to be 'reduced to a minimum by adopting the principles of Co-operative Housekeeping',* which would involve

(a) Central heating and hot water supply. (b) Large scale and therefore economical purchasing of food, and its expert preparation by a trained staff in large and scientifically equipped central kitchens, whence it would be conveyed to the private apartments of each family. (c) Central laundry worked by a special staff at a minimum price, which would supersede the present wasteful and uncomfortable method of the individual family wash. (d) The provision of an infirmary and isolation hospital for the use of families in each co-operative dwelling. (e) The similar provision for use, if desired, of a crèche, nursery school, gymnasium, reading room, and so forth.

* *Britannia*, 2 November 1917. Christabel had broached the idea of co-operative housekeeping at least as early as December 1915 (see 'Married women's health', *Suffragette*, 5 December 1913). Co-operative housekeeping was not, however, a major concern of the pre-war WSPU which, unlike the Women's Party, always avoided committing itself to any specific programme to be fought for after the vote had been won.

Christabel had clearly advanced from her earlier emphasis on the symbolic importance of votes for women to a more concrete vision of radically reformed conditions for working-class women. She had no real conception, however, of how the reforms she proposed were to be financed – far from advocating redistributive taxation, the Women's Party simply claimed that greater industrial efficiency and productivity would bring to the working class the standard of comfort of the middle class, without, it seems, the middle class being forced to make economic concessions. Greater productivity could only be achieved, the Women's Party insisted, by 'captaincy in Industry. . . . In Industry, as on board ship, there must be captain, officers, and crew. In Industry, as in an orchestra, there must be a conductor and those who play to his beat.'³¹ Christabel claimed that captaincy in industry would result not only in greater efficiency and higher productivity, but in shorter hours and higher pay. Christabel did not, however, describe the way in which shorter hours and higher pay would, in practice, be obtained from the captains of industry; she merely said that the hours of labour should be determined by 'engineering and organising experts' rather than by the workers themselves.³² Christabel's programme begged many questions, as neither she nor her colleagues were much concerned with the economic basis of social reform, or with the ways in which her curiously varied proposals could possibly be implemented without clashing directly with each other.

Though the programme of the Women's Party was a strange amalgam of apparently conflicting ideas, the immediate aims of the party's leaders were by no means obscure; in late 1917 and 1918, Christabel, her mother, and Mrs Drummond spent much time in South Wales, the Midlands, and on Clydeside, where they harangued workers against striking in war time on the grounds that strikes and shop stewards' committees betrayed British soldiers and furthered Bolshevik aims. Many of their listeners agreed with them, and the campaign against Bolshevik pacifists and 'shirkers' met with considerable success.

Soon after its founding, the Women's Party stated that women could 'best serve the nation by keeping clear of men's party political machinery',³³ but following Lloyd George's decision to issue letters of approval to parliamentary candidates, the Women's Party decided not to follow its own advice – in

November 1918, shortly after the armistice, Christabel contacted Lloyd George with regard to her possible candidacy in the Westbury Division of Wiltshire. Lloyd George was pleased to give her his support, writing to Bonar Law:³⁴

I am not sure that we have any women candidates, and I think it is highly desirable that we should. The Women's Party, of which Miss Pankhurst is the Leader, has been extraordinarily useful, as you know, to the Government – especially in the industrial districts where there has been trouble during the last two very trying years. They have fought the Bolshevist and Pacifist element with great skill, tenacity, and courage.

At the end of November, Christabel switched her candidacy to the newly created constituency of Smethwick, an industrial suburb of Birmingham, and a few days later Lloyd George and Bonar Law prevailed upon a Major S. N. Thompson, already approved as the Unionist and Coalition candidate for the seat, to stand down.³⁵ Thompson duly abandoned his candidacy, thereby giving Christabel a free run against a Labour candidate, J. E. Davison, the national organizer of the Ironfounders' Society. Christabel, in turn, pledged her support to Lloyd George, Bonar Law, and the Coalition.

Christabel made anti-Bolshevism the central theme of her campaign. The main issue of the election was, she stated, 'between the Red Flag and the Union Jack', and the Labour Party was 'entirely dominated by Bolshevism and Pacifism.'³⁶ Both Philip Snowden and Mary MacArthur were, she alleged, Bolsheviks, and Ramsay MacDonald was among the numerous Labour leaders possessing 'Bolshevist and pro-German sympathies'.³⁷ In reply to the charges against the Labour Party, J. E. Davison called Christabel a 'political flibbertigibbet' who had been 'all things by turn and nothing long.'³⁸

In the Coupon Election, which was held on 14 December 1918, J. E. Davison defeated Christabel by a small margin. He received 9,389 votes whereas Christabel received 8,614, a difference of only 775. With the issue of 20 December, *Britannia* abruptly ceased publication. In 1919 the Women's Party itself ceased to exist, and Mrs Pankhurst and Christabel withdrew from electoral politics.

During the course of the next two years, Christabel became an ardent believer in the Second Coming of Christ. From 1921 to 1940 she spent most of her time as a travelling evangelist, preaching the gospel of the Second Advent in Britain, Canada, and the United States. She wrote five books on her new beliefs: *The Lord Cometh!* (1923), *Pressing Problems of the Closing Age* (1924), *The World's Unrest: Visions of the Dawn* (1926), *Seeing the Future* (1929), and *The Uncurtained Future* (1940). In *Pressing Problems*, Christabel professed disillusion with the results of women's enfranchisement, writing:³⁹

Some of us hoped more from woman suffrage than is ever going to be accomplished. My own large anticipations were based partly upon ignorance (which the late war dispelled) of the magnitude of the task which we women reformers so confidently wished to undertake when the vote should be ours.

Though Christabel was disillusioned, her new beliefs were not entirely unrelated to the ideas she had professed during the final phase of the militant campaign, in that she still believed that the world would in time be utterly transformed. Women, she now thought, were 'wholly unable, just as men are unable, even to form, much less to put into effect, a policy that will regenerate the world', but it was 'unmistakably certain' that Christ would 'come to initiate the Millennium.'⁴⁰ A 'season of tribulation and world-purification' would, however, be necessary before the 'new thousand year age' could begin.⁴¹ Within this schema, some familiar elements remained. Evil, once primarily the province of males, and later associated with Germany, was now attributed to human nature as a whole; Christ was the 'only hope of the world, for by no human instrumentality can the world be cleansed and healed of its terrible ills.'⁴² Christabel now believed that all human systems of government involved 'muddles, miscalculations, failures, tragic surprises, [and] tyrannies' and that the alternative was 'theocracy', which was 'the divine reality of the future – the rule of God! That is the remedy for the failure of human rule of every form and in every age.'⁴³

During the 1920s and 1930s, Christabel's life was largely peripatetic. In 1925 she lived for about six months at Juan-les-Pins, on the French Riviera, where she, her mother, and

Mrs Tuke ran a tea-shop called the English Tea Shop of Good Hope. In 1936, while in England, Christabel was made a Dame Commander of the British Empire (DBE), in honour of her work for women's enfranchisement. Christabel had lived with Grace Roe in Santa Barbara and Hollywood, California, for about six months in 1921, and in 1940 she returned to Los Angeles where she lived until her death on 13 February 1958.

Mrs Pankhurst spent the early 1920s in Canada, lecturing on behalf of Moral Hygiene. After nearly a year spent in Bermuda and on the Riviera with Christabel, she returned to England at the end of 1925. She was subsequently adopted as a Conservative candidate for the strongly Labour East End constituency of Whitechapel and St George's, Stepney, but her health failed well before any election could be held, and she died on 14 June 1928, at the age of sixty-nine.

On 6 March 1930, Stanley Baldwin unveiled a statue of Mrs Pankhurst in the Victoria Tower Gardens, under the shadow of the Houses of Parliament. On the base of the statue was carved an inscription which praised Mrs Pankhurst's courageous leadership of the movement for women's suffrage. A plaque honouring Christabel was added later, as was a plaque dedicated to over 1,000 women who endured imprisonment for the sake of the enfranchisement of their sex.