

Why I Am a Militant Suffragette—By Elizabeth Freeman

ELIZABETH FREEMAN, known among them as "Lady Betty," is one of the foremost, and in some quarters termed the fiercest, of the militant suffragettes.

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SIX years of battle on English soil, and two terms in hideous Holloway Jail have convinced me that militancy is the only way to suffrage for women in England.

For forty-five years they tried every other method that is legitimate to secure votes for women. It was Sir Henry Campbell Bannerman who advised the course that is now being followed. "You can never win in this way," he said; "you must pester and irritate."

The world is appalled, or professes to be appalled, by what are regarded as the outrages perpetrated by militants in England. "Are those women crazy?" it demands. "Why do they act in this way?"

No; they are not crazy. At their head is a woman who is not only sane, but who insists upon sane views and sane acts by her followers. Sane, and a saint. When I met Mrs. Pankhurst and took her hand I felt that I was clasping the palm of a saint, and so she is very generally regarded, even by those who differ from her. Why do they not forcibly feed Mrs. Pankhurst when she is in prison? Because they fear they will kill her, and they know that if Mrs. Pankhurst were killed the English Government would be overturned. We court forcible feeding. The Government fears to inflict it too far lest public sentiment turn and read it.

Sane? Absolutely yes; and every act of theirs, no matter how it may appear in its working out, has a sane and consistent object.

These so-called "wild women" are wholly logical and entirely consistent.

Why do they act so? Because there is no other way to win their cause. In America, where men are reasonable and quick-witted, discussion and agitation will succeed. But the only way to convince a Briton is with a brick. Johnny Bull has to be hit between the eyes with a brick to startle him out of his smug complacency and make him think. In England you have to reckon with slow wits and a well nigh unshakable obstinacy, and drastic spectacular means are the only ones that will awaken them and make them act.

Why do they act so? Because they want to lay the trouble where it belongs, at the gate of the Government. They "act so" because they want to make the British people so uncomfortable that they will demand "what is the cause of it?" and when they will, and do, the suffragettes answer, "the Government is the cause." "Then let the Government stop it!" the Britons will answer, and the suffragettes will reply, "Government cannot." "Then turn out the Government and get in a new one that can stop the trouble," John Bull will answer, and the problem will be solved.

You do not know, you in America, who so glibly criticise the "wild women" of England, that thirty-six bills granting suffrage to women have passed the House of Commons and have been stopped by the twenty Cabinet Ministers and other dependents of Government in the House. Several times a majority of the members of the House have been elected on pledges to vote for woman suffrage and have broken their pledges because Government appealed to their selfish motives. The first class is composed of the Cabinet Ministers and their secretaries. The second of barristers and others in

the service of the Crown. The third are persons whose election expenses were paid by Government. Fourth are manufacturers who derive all their patronage from Government as paper manufacturers. The fifth are the owners of provincial newspapers that have been subsidized by Government. These classes are the obstructionists and pledge-breakers. Private bills, introduced by private individuals not associated with these classes, reach a certain

point, the second reading, and are killed by Government influence. Suffragettes and their friends have become convinced that the bill to pass must emanate from Government.

For example, people exclaim in horror at the burning of a grandstand at the ball grounds, "There is no reason for such horror!" A grandstand represents little intrinsic value so far as the timber that composes it is concerned. But it stands for a Briton's love of

sport, and if you strike him there you reach a vital spot.

Astounded, enraged, he says: "What does this mean?" "It means the Government won't let women have the vote, and they want to tell you so," is the brick that comes hurtling between his eyes. "Then let them have the vote and let us have peace," is the answer we confidently expect to receive.

Women are going about securing suffrage as men secured it. While the men were trying to get it they laid the blunderbus about them. When they succeeded they placed the blunderbus on the shelf and left it to rust. So will women do.

I challenge anyone to produce proof that any militant ever did anything that was a menace to any life except her own. I myself went into an empty house to assure myself that it was empty before my companion threw a stone. There was a hue and cry when a stone was thrown into Mr. Asquith's carriage, and there were horrified exclamations, "What if the Minister had been in the carriage!" The stone throwers took very good care that he was not in the carriage.

Hands were raised and eyes rolled heavenward when Lady White's house was burned. But the burning was done in Lady White's absence, and there is not the slightest doubt that the building was very well insured.

There was horror when a bomb was discovered in hoary St. Paul's Cathedral. "Sacrilege!" we heard all about us. But the bomb didn't go off. Few of the bombs are that kind. The women of England revere and love the old buildings. When a bomb is found in one, be sure it is a non-effective bomb.

A bomb was found in a commuter's railway carriage. Yes; but it didn't go off. Besides, how do we know a suffragette put it there?

Mischievous boys might have smuggled it into the railway carriage, or, what is probable and much to be dreaded, enemies of militancy may have done the deed with the intention of ascribing it to suffragettes."

The case of Emily Wilding Davidson is in point. She was a girl who had the degree of M. A. from a university. She was brilliant and zealous. Eventually she was taken to Holloway jail. There she conceived the idea that if she killed herself she would help the cause. Twice she flung herself over the banister, striking the stone steps with her head. For some reason she survived her terrible injuries.

Mrs. Mary Clarke, Mrs. Pankhurst's sister, died two days after being released from prison. The censored newspapers gave two lines to it, yet Mrs. Clarke was as gloriously a martyr as was ever any saint of the early ages.

The militants seek martyrdom; yes, and sell it. I know five delicate women who have cancers of the breast caused by bruises received while they were members of deputations.

Lady Constance Lytton, forcibly fed in prison, felt that life was slipping away from her, and she was willing to let it go. As she lay in her cell she watched the faint bars of sunlight form a cross on the wall. "That is the symbol of woman's burden. I will carry it on," she said, and lived.

But the supreme spirit of the militant movement is one that, I say reverently, is met of this world. In the great battle of Downing street as I looked down the line of marching women I saw that their faces were uplifted, their eyes turned to heaven, and there was that in their expression which awed and uplifted me. It was as though the early Crusaders had been reincarnated in them. I felt that I was watching the advance of a mighty Christian army.



Elizabeth Freeman,
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