

HARPER'S WEEKLY

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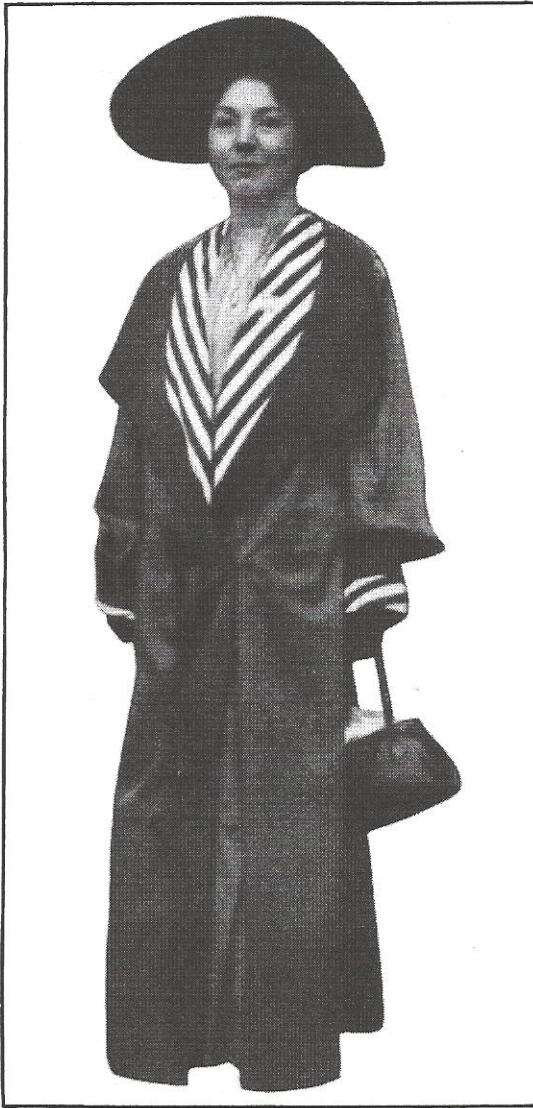
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Christabel Pankhurst's outstanding quality is valiant purity

WHAT is she like? Well, if you care to take my word for it, she is, in sum, unlike anything the world has seen before.

I ought to begin by admitting that I am not a wholly uncritical observer of Miss Pankhurst. I do not agree with all her theories, I am not with her in all her practice.

But any one can make a fancy sketch of a young woman who presents as many points of attractiveness as the Organizer-in-Chief of the W. S. P. U.

While my sketch will be fact rather than fancy, it will not pretend to be all the facts, even in so far as I see them. The hour for final judgment is not yet.

In the meantime women who realize what is involved in the fight for the Suffrage have no duty more binding than to prevent misrepresentation of those who are in the forefront of the fight, those captains who, by the various roads, are leading the legions which converge towards the Parliaments of the world.

The duty I speak of is most imperative towards those most grossly misrepresented.

I have often refused to do a study of Miss Pankhurst. She seemed so much more capable than most people of making herself clear.

The misunderstanding of her that I find current on my arrival in America moves me to set down these impressions from our acquaintanceship extending over something like eight years.

She lives in the memory of most, turning up that round chin of hers to meet a question as to tactics; a slender body braced for defense; flinging out a hand to

Christabel

By ELIZABETH ROBINS

send home some thrust, shrivelling criticism in the caustic of her wit; intolerant of opposition, burying objections under weight of controverting fact; reconciling the objector by an imperturbable good-humor; often harnessing him to the Movement by virtue of her own completeness of dedication.

WE saw her "full face" in the early raids on Westminster, those called with an audacious irony: "Going on Deputation to the Prime Minister,"—much as a warder might go to the door of a cell and ask the prisoner, "will you kindly come out, sir, and be hanged."

One sees again the face under a hat awry, yet every flower, or end of ribbon, showing flag-like where was the thickest of the fight and where the straight way lay—the way to the rudest publicity for matters never so fully stated before.

One sees her facing the police, stopped by them, protesting, always with self-possession and with apparent expectation of succeeding in the impossible errand.

Profile, this time, as she rises in the dock. A half sheet of paper in her hand with its three or four notes; the stylograph stuck back in the case which is pinned to the yoke of her gown. You see her lifting that face to the perplexed Jury, to the scandalized Judge. "Come," she seems to say, "let us reason together."

She is complimented from the bench upon her able advocacy, and sent to prison.

She seems to have had her fill of such compliments.

No one must suppose that she wears always the militant face. I think of the one I saw flushed with fever, lying on a sofa in a Yorkshire Hotel. I had just heard her speak in the market place—speak with strange patience in the teeth of ignorance and insult, speak to an audience I wondered she would care about convincing. She was ill at the time, struggling with a cold that would have extinguished most people. I had watched her standing for an hour in the windy market place, had listened to her clouded voice, growing hoarser as she explained to the foolish, and endured the drunken.

HALF an hour after, she lay in my room with closed eyes and fever-bright cheeks, while her mother went out to buy quinine, or what not. Had this not been our first meeting I should have known better than to waste breath urging her to stay on the sofa all the evening. She had, I knew, no meeting of her own, but up she stands and we three go to a man's political gathering. The girl I had thought fit only for bed, rises in her place and attacks a scheme advocated by the man, afterwards her (and all women's) good friend, George Lansbury. That night he was explaining the need of an appropriation for poor boys' school games and athletics—in the name of the betterment of the race. He found no fault with, he even defended, the grotesquely smaller provision proposed for the benefit of poor girls (and presumably for the benefit of such little share as they might conceivably have in that matter—of bettering the race). Suddenly the girl was on her feet by my side, hardly audible at first, through the fog of her stifling cold, but still able hotly to denounce Mr. Lansbury for not protesting against unfair discrimination in favor of physical training for the stronger sex. He, poor man, astonished, a little injured, feeling apparently that he had done rather well (considering the strength of conservative opposition to get any appropriation whatsoever), modestly looking, as I thought, for congratulation—to find himself hauled over the coals, and baited and trounced by this little girl with the hoarse voice.

I rather think that was the first time Mr. Lansbury ever saw Christabel "full face." Little enough in any case could he have dreamed then, that he would listen to that voice till it should lead him and his children to prison.

Another time I see her lying in the shade of a cypress tree in a Sussex garden—a lissome, relaxed figure in an apple-green gown. In the dark eyes none of the fire we had seen burning on Westminster raids, but a light that seemed more a childish gladness of spirit.

She lies there and gives and takes chaff with a school-boy. He, not a being of easy enthusiasms, is soon among Christabel's friends. They sit side by side, he showing her some illustrations in the *Sphere*. An Anti-militant, struck by the tableau, drew me aside—"I've watched her for two days. I have the very strongest feeling there must be some mistake. That little schoolgirl *can't* be making all this trouble."

That was the opinion in the adjacent village, though obviously shaken by her ringing up the London Headquarters office to insist that the Mayor of Dublin should be held to the promise that had been extracted from him—heaven knows how—the amazing promise to make an official visit to London in order to exercise an ancient and forgotten right, unused for centuries, to plead before the bar of the House of Commons. The plea in this case was of course: "give women a share in citizenship"—and Christabel in Sussex pulled the strings that brought the chief civic dignitary out of Dublin and drew him over the Irish Sea to stand in his mayoral robes and insignia before the English Commons—adjuring them "do justice to women!"

WE have in London a great music hall whose name, the *Pavilion*, was long associated solely with the most frivolous form of variety entertainment. This hall has been crowded to its capacity, year in, year out, at the Monday suffrage meetings, and not only by those interested in the women's movement. We have seen the boxes there filled with the gilded youth turning their backs on the stage and talking among themselves on those Monday afternoons, just as they are in the habit of doing during the less diverting "turns" at night. We have seen, at Christabel Pankhurst's standing up to speak, all those backs turn, and the faces of the men crane over the box, curious, alert, responsive to as much as they understood—to the life and youth and valor of her, if nothing more—nudging one another at some hit; seizing her points, laughing with her at her enemies, applauding her impassioned attacks upon the government with as much enthusiasm as though she were a Russian dancer.

And when Christabel Pankhurst's "turn" was over we have seen the entire party rise and leave the hall.

The Christabel these young gentlemen thought such good fun was the Christabel who, already for some years, had been trudging up and down the country, going through mud and rain, holding little obscure meetings in stuffy rooms; the Christabel who was the first to brave the horrors of the unreformed Holloway; the Christabel who gave the flower of her youth to make votes for women the most vital issue of the day.

HAD you called to see Miss Pankhurst?—so had all these sitting in the entry room. At last you stood in her little office. The only room she had of all the many in use by the Union was a sort of passage.

A big desk occupied a good share of the space. On a swivel chair, a little person writing an editorial. One window, two doors, and in and out of these doors a constant procession—girls with armfuls of literature, girls with letters, girls with telegrams, girls and women hurrying through one way or another no matter who was there, or what was being said, written, or thought out. In the heart of that hurly-burly all the most vital business of the Union was shaped and launched, up to the hour when she left that night just in time to escape the clutches of an exasperated government.

In the great new building in the Kingsway, Christabel has her more comfortable quarters. She has never occupied them, never seen them.

WHEN the W. S. P. U. Fund had rolled up its staggering sum, to women's innocent surprise, the mere financial prosperity of the Union bred in the breasts of politicians a respect they had never shown towards the principles of justice, or the spectacle of devotion to an ideal. The Fund became also a source of envy and all uncharitableness in certain adherents of causes less generously supported.

The air grew thick with vague suspicion and open charges that the Pankhursts were feathering their nests. They were living extravagantly on the fat of the land. Mrs. Pankhurst and Miss Sylvia lived enough of their time in prison to take the point out of any application of the charge to them. So it was oftenest referred to the Pankhurst who was constrained to live on the fat of "the pleasant land of France."



Christabel Pankhurst in three years of militant martyrdom has changed from the girl shown in the right hand picture to that shown in the left

Coming down from the mountains of Savoy I dropped in one evening on the exiled Organizer. I found her in the luxury she had then for months been steeped in—living *en pension* in a third-class hotel in a town on the coast.

One room served the controlling spirit of the rich Union—one room to sleep in and to work in. That narrow bed-chamber on the top floor—no lift—reached only by climbing endless stairs, that place of meager, dingy furnishing, constituted not only the luxury of her personal establishment, but served as editor's office for the Union paper—the real Headquarters of the Movement. Out of that little room went forth the energy which, if it was not responsible for keeping the question of Woman Suffrage intensely alive, did certainly control and guide the more militant forces.

TALKING till late into the night, we spoke of a woman whose latitude of view in matters of sex-relation had given much offense both to Suffragists and Antis. Christabel had no love for the theme, but she pitied the woman—explained her as a doctor diagnoses disease.

Her attitude to the subject reminded me of another midnight talk a year or so before. She had come down into the south of England for a little rest and I was remorseful at letting her sit up so late. I offered her a novel to take to bed. Yes, she would like a novel. She took the one I offered and with a gesture of distaste gave it back. "I began it," she said, "but I couldn't stomach those scenes between the wife and the husband." I had not myself read the book, which had not long been out. Miss Pankhurst described cursorily, with an effect of haste to be done with it, a certain scene which, along with the critics' comment on its "strength," and

Maupassant-like veracity, the world in general had swallowed without blinking.

At sight of Christabel Pankhurst's loathing, I remembered the unblushing utilitarian she is. Whatever expresses the views she shares she will applaud, however little literate the effort may be. However well done, what runs counter to her views she sees no merit in. In fact she cannot "see" it at all.

SO I urged the right of the artist (and the author in question is one) to treat of any and everything under heaven. In any case, as Christabel could not deny, scenes far more *risqué* had been written by men of repute. Whereupon she jumped down my throat. That was precisely the trouble, she said, with this woman-writer. She was trying to go one better—or worse—than men. Men have some excuse. They *have* to invent. They know very little about women. But "women must stop going to men for information about their own sex."

I had long known that many women, and not a few men, accustomed to look upon themselves as fastidious in matters touching sex-dignity recognized in Christabel Pankhurst an unconscious critic of their meaner standards.

Not only is the mind of this young woman constitutionally incapable of making a base use of unsavory topics, she is (not deliberately, but inevitably, because so was she created,) a touchstone of moral soundness.

If I were told that, leaving out the politician and speaking of the essential woman, I must give in two words the sum of eight years' knowledge—I would, out of all the resources of the dictionary, content myself with saying that Christabel Pankhurst's outstanding quality is a valiant purity.