

CHAPTER V

THE MILITANT SUFFRAGETTE MOVEMENT

1899-1907

THE Labour Party Emmeline Pankhurst had so ardently desired in the eighteen-nineties had come. The Trade Union Congress of 1899 had accepted Keir Hardie's scheme to run Labour candidates under the auspices of a Labour Representation Committee¹ of affiliated Trade Unions and Socialist organizations, of which the largest and most effective was his own I.L.P. The Socialists thus gained the mass backing they had lacked. The Taft Vale judgement of 1901, which was a terrible reverse to the Unions, swung almost the whole Trade Union movement into line for political action. I.L.P. enthusiasm ran high.

Mrs. Pankhurst shared in the rejoicing. As we have seen, she had formed her political opinions in an atmosphere of reform and liberation. Her impressionable nature was now to be influenced by a narrowly exclusive feminist school, which saw the world of Labour in terms of "beef-steaks and butter for work-

¹ Afterwards here referred to as the Labour Party, though it did not adopt the title till some years later.

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ing men; tea and bread for working women," refusing to admit that the welfare of the working woman, either as mother or wage-earner, was in any degree involved in raising the status of the working class as a whole. The hitherto dormant political interest of her eldest daughter was suddenly aroused by contact with the North of England Society for Women's Suffrage.¹ When the I.L.P. propagandists came as usual to stay at Nelson Street, Christabel heckled them fiercely. Old friends, like the Bruce Glasiers, were dismayed by her insistence on what they considered a mere barren issue of bourgeois politics. They had broken out of political Liberalism burning with the hope of a Socialist Commonwealth. They did not, like the active feminists, feel the disfranchisement of women as a searing brand of inferiority. Some of the opportunist were actually opposed to votes for women, declaring they would vote Tory, being more reactionary than men. Philip Snowden, later a strong supporter, was then an anti. Mrs. Pankhurst was thrown into a ferment; was it for this that she had devoted nine years of service and sacrifice to the I.L.P.? She bitterly seconded Christabel's reproaches to her that she had allowed the cause of women to be effaced. From that time forward she often told me: "Christabel is not like other women; not like you and me; she will never be led away by her affections!"

As was characteristic of her, once she had re-entered the franchise struggle, it became for her the only cause in the world. Moreover, this, and this only, was the

¹ The successor of the Manchester National Society of Women's Suffrage formed by Dr. Pankhurst and others in 1865.