

become acceptable only to the Conservatives, and was rejected by the Government in power and the majority in Parliament; to employ the hunger-strike more concretely as an implement in the struggle for the vote. I arranged for the election of a deputation to Asquith at several great East End public meetings, throwing it open for the audiences to decide the franchise to be demanded. As I anticipated, the demand was a vote for every woman over twenty-one years. Asquith refused to receive the deputation. I announced it would nevertheless proceed to the House of Commons, accompanied by a procession of supporters, and that I would hunger-strike, in prison or out, until he would concede an interview. He repeated his refusal. Our members wept at my decision, but mustered loyally for the march on the evening of June 10th. Too weak after a recent hunger-strike, to walk, I was carried on a stretcher. The police, in ambush at a narrow part of the road, broke through and captured me. Masses of people pressed on to the House. The deputation failed to get face to face with Asquith, but fear of a riot permitted a meeting on the sacred ground of Parliament Square.

Next day, the hunger-strike was debated in the Commons. Again McKenna was urged to let the hunger-strikers die. He replied that for every woman who died, scores would come forward to earn the crown of martyrdom. "When there were twenty, thirty or more deaths in prison, you would have a violent reaction of public opinion. . . . I am bound to say for myself that I could never take a hand in carrying out that policy." He admitted that he had many

times had Suffragette prisoners medically examined with a view to getting them certified insane, but the doctors had refused to lend themselves to the deed.¹ His one hope was to proceed against the W.S.P.U. subscribers by civil action. If they could individually be made responsible for the whole of the damage, the insurance companies would proceed against them, and if the revenue of the militants were cut off, he believed "the power of Mrs. Pankhurst would be at an end."

I was meanwhile in prison, anticipating a stubborn tussle with Asquith. I looked death in the face, deciding to take the risk. I was released on June 18th, and was driven immediately to the House of Commons, where I lay on the steps of the little door near the Strangers' Entrance to continue my strike. The police were about to remove me, when Keir Hardie came out with Asquith's promise to receive our deputation in two days' time. That he had given way after repeated refusal was unprecedented; we believed it augured early success for the old cause. Replying to the deputation, he virtually abandoned his long opposition: "If the change has to come, we must face it boldly, and make it thorough-going and democratic." Everyone agreed his reply meant the beginning of the end. I was anxious to press the matter further. I got Lansbury to arrange an interview for me with Lloyd George. We saw him together at 10 Downing Street. He offered to refuse to join the Liberal Government after the coming election, except on condition that a Reform Bill should be introduced, in which (to meet the

¹ *Vide* Official Parliamentary Report, June 11th, 1914.