

evidently lost as it ends mid-sentence, though the planned end to that paragraph can be found in the handwritten copy which concludes with the words 'end of Chapter 8'.²¹ Not, presumably, the intended end of the book.

Sylvia did not explain why she abandoned the work which she nevertheless preserved in her papers. The East London campaign certainly placed a huge demand on her time, but Sylvia always managed to sustain extensive written work alongside campaigning and imprisonments. Perhaps, rather, it was that the question Sylvia strove to resolve on paper, about how working-class people might truly articulate their own emancipation, was being answered in practice in the mass movement she was helping to create. The manuscript became part of the preparatory intellectual work for the movement which took priority as it further shaped and developed Sylvia's thinking. Placed in its context, this manuscript provides the link between Sylvia's private criticisms of the WSPU and the public action she would take to change the course of suffrage history.

AMERICAN LETTERS: EARLY DRAFTS

Sylvia's published writings on the suffragette movement, *The Suffragette* (1911) and *The Suffragette Movement* (1931), resemble the great nineteenth-century novels of her youth, with dense, descriptive prose and guiding linear narrative. Sylvia's American book forms a stark contrast when placed alongside them. The style here is experimental and changing, from the lyrical, dream-like evocation of a performance of *Sleeping Beauty* on New York's Lower East Side, to the empirical precision behind her critique of economic inequality, and the haunted tone of the nightmare vision of a prison in Tennessee. This immediate and thematic approach reflects the book's origins in Sylvia's writing during the course of the tour in the spare, quiet hours that she could find in train carriages and hotel rooms.

In a draft of the Preface, Sylvia mused over the title of the manuscript: 'I have called this book *American Letters* because' she wrote, before abandoning the sentence here and striking a vertical line down the whole page.²² Whether or not this remained the intended title is unclear as there is no title page to the manuscript, but the explanation for this draft title is to be found in the final Preface: 'The following pages were in the first place written in the form of letters to a friend in England' (p. 65).

Keir Hardie

In the main, the letters were written to the Labour MP and former Labour leader, Keir Hardie. A long-standing friend of her parents, Sylvia grew better acquainted with Hardie after she moved to London as an art student. While her mother and sister initially established the WSPU where they lived in Manchester in 1903, they aspired to create a national campaign with its headquarters in the capital. Before Christabel moved to London in 1906 to take up the role of organising secretary, this task had initially fallen to Sylvia, who regularly sought the advice of Hardie, the WSPU's most steadfast supporter in Parliament. At some point, the relationship became romantic, for which the most decisive evidence remains the letters they exchanged whilst Sylvia was travelling in America. Her letters combined reflections on American politics and her expressions of love, loneliness and longing for Hardie's company. Filled with endearments – Hardie addressing her as 'sweetheart' while she began her letters 'Darling' and concluded with 'love and kisses my sweetheart' – these letters expressed a passion that was concealed from public view.²³ In 1879, Hardie had married Lillie Wilson from whom he was evidently emotionally as well as geographically distant; she lived with their children in Scotland far away from Hardie's Merthyr Tydfil constituency in South Wales and his London lodgings close to Parliament. The relationship was further complicated by developments in the suffragette movement, as Emmeline and Christabel insisted upon the separation of the WSPU from all political parties and expressed increasing hostility towards the Labour Party. Sylvia's letters from America, then, represented a personal and political rejection of WSPU policy. By the summer of 1913, the romantic relationship had become unsupportable for Sylvia, whose loyalties were painfully divided, though their friendship and political co-operation would last until Hardie's death two years later. The relationship between Sylvia and Keir Hardie, which produced the 'first draft' of the text, informed a prominent concern in the manuscript with the relationship between the women's and labour movements.

Hardie, as recipient of the first draft, was perhaps also the inspiration for Sylvia's attempt at writing an impressionistic work from letters. By the time Sylvia first embarked for America, Hardie had already undertaken quite extensive foreign political tours. During two tours of America, in 1895 and 1908 (he would travel there again, after Sylvia, in 1912), and a 'world tour' from July 1907 until April 1908, he wrote letters detailing