

Violence of England's "Furies" Defended by Inez Millholland

Called Forth by "The Lurking Brutality in so Many Englishmen," It Is the Only Argument That Can Convince Them of the Justice of Woman's Cause, Says Mrs. Boissevain, Answering Sir Conan Doyle's Prediction of "Wholesale Lynching" for the Militants.

By Mrs. Inez Millholland Boissevain,
The Famous Woman Lawyer and American Militant Suffragist.

SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE has predicted that wholesale lynching will be the answer of the men of England to the demand of the women of England for political liberty. I would not be surprised. Sir Arthur knows his Englishmen; so do the militants. Militancy is the result of that knowledge, and the losers in the game are not the women.

Brutality, even when the origin of the instinct that employs it is righteous, always reacts to the harm of the person who makes use of it. It obliterates the faculties that we have come to look upon as necessary to civilization—it deadens the sensibilities, it blurs imagination and sympathy—it coarsens the spiritual fibre and dims the perceptions. When the origin of the instinct to brutality lies itself in injustice these results are multiplied a thousandfold. That is why any such outbreaks on the part of Englishmen as Sir Conan Doyle predicts, would be fraught with danger to the spiritual progress of England.

In fact, these results are already apparent. The hardening process which officials and spectators have had to go through in order to carry through the persecution of English women fighting for their rights has led the authorities from depth to depth of degradation. England has become, as the London Times truly says, "the laughing stock of the nations"—not because of the repeated triumphs of the militants over the Government, but because of the repeated exhibitions of spiritual poverty among her statesmen.

Now, I am not disputing the fact that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's predictions as to the future attitude of Englishmen towards English women is likely to result in lynching. On the contrary, it is the existence of such lurking brutality in the nature of so many Englishmen that is responsible for the character of the activities of England's women. The militants are not betraying their own natures by their activities. They are betraying their intimate knowledge of the nature of English men, who have for centuries looked upon women as "something better than his dog; a little dearer than his horse," and have treated them accordingly, privately and publicly, in police courts and the sanctity of the home, permitting, for example, the husband to beat his wife, and, when battered and bruised, she appeared in court against him, to punish him with a fine of \$5.

Any reflection cast by the violence of the actions of the militants should fall where it belongs—on the statesmen who are responsible. Brutality begets brutality; violence begets violence; law-breaking begets law-breaking; and if English women have disregarded the law, in the making of which they have had no say, you may be quite sure the law-breaking game did not begin with them. It began with their opponents, and, apparently, if what Sir Arthur Conan Doyle says is true it is likely to end where it began.

That the Government was the first to disregard law and constitutional rights many people do not know. The women who were first arrested as a result of their interruptions of political meetings—interruptions which are by no means illegal—were confined, as every prisoner is confined who is confined for political offences, even though that offence be murder, in the first division of the English prisons.

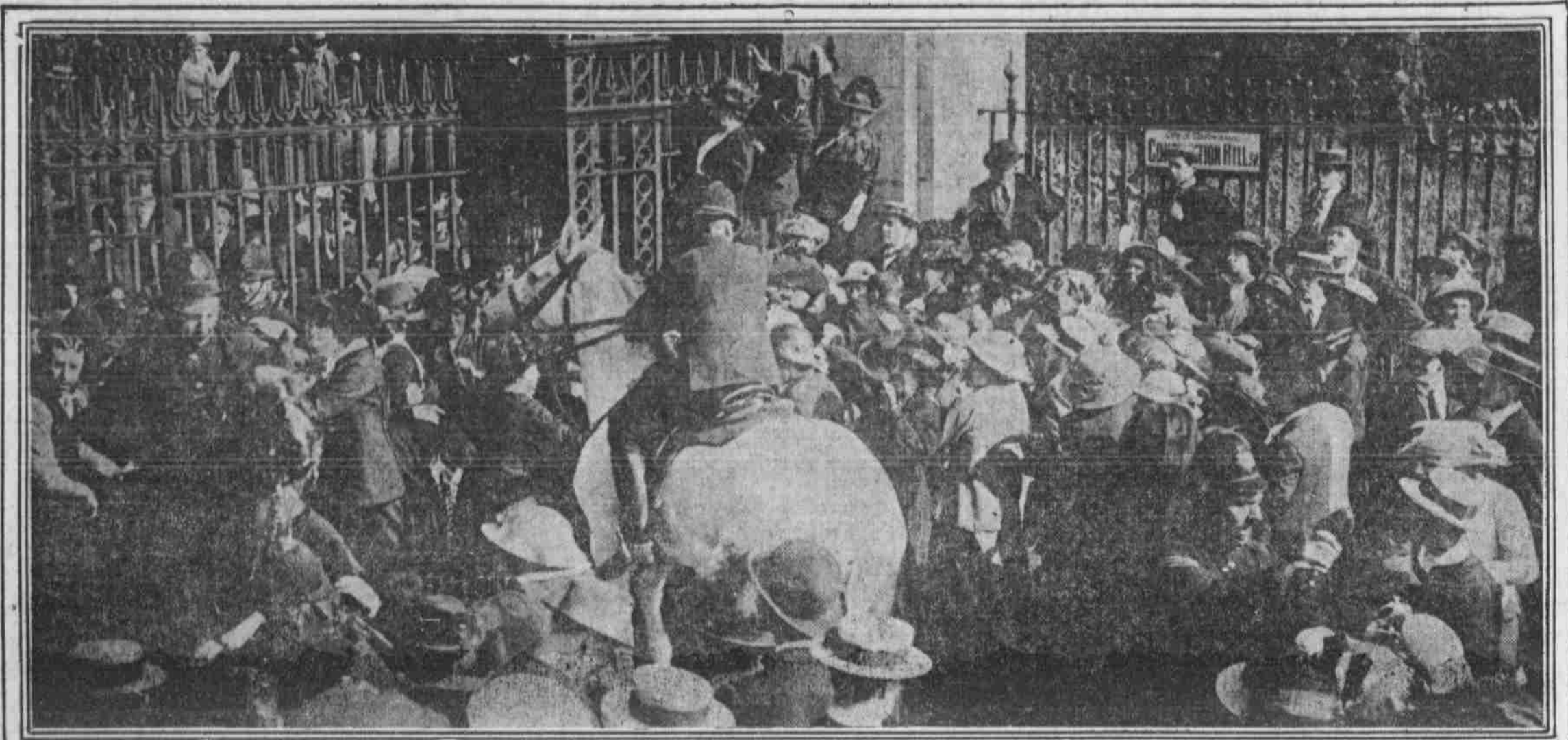
Later, the Government, in order to intimidate the women, committed them to the Third Division, although at no time was it suggested that their offence had any other than a political motive. The Third Division is the one reserved for the most serious criminals, and hence the imprisonment of political prisoners there was a denial to the women of a right that had never been denied to men.

This fact, and this fact alone, was responsible for the hunger strike.

The hunger strike is not a protest against imprisonment. It is a protest, and the only protest possible, to prisoners—prisoners being individuals who are one degree worse off than those who are outside the Constitution—against imprisonment in the Third Division. So long as the women were granted their rights and imprisoned in the First Division, there was no hunger strike. When their "prison" rights were denied them, they struck.

Now, if the British Government is in the right, why does it not allow these hunger-striking women to die in prison? The answer is simple. They dare not. It is because the actions of those who would be responsible, i. e., of the British Government, will not bear investigation that such deaths would entail.

Further, the public does not realize that it is a denial of a constitutional right that is responsible for the outbreaks in Parliament Square and Buckingham Palace. The Bill of Rights provides that every subject shall have the right to petition the King or his representative, the Prime Minister, for the redress of any grievance, provided that such subject or subjects do not approach the King or his representative in a deputation larger than thirteen.



Police Fighting to Keep Militant Suffragettes Out of Buckingham Palace, the London Home of King George. The Three Women to the Right Have Chained Themselves to the Railings.
Photo by Underwood and Underwood, New York.



Mrs. Inez Millholland Boissevain, the Beautiful American Militant Suffragist. On the Right—Mrs. Pankhurst, Arrested in a Raid on Buckingham Palace. Mrs. Pankhurst and Her Militants Are the Only English People of Heroic Stuff Left There, Thinks Mrs. Boissevain.



PHOTO BY UNDERWOOD & UNDERWOOD, N. Y.

deputations never larger than thirteen, and their approach has been blocked by the police. The women were perfectly within their rights—the Prime Minister was the outlaw.

After repeated and futile demands to interview the King's representative, the women determined to lay their grievances before the King himself, in accordance with the Bill of Rights. The same refusal of a constitutional privilege followed, and the same disturbance resulted. And the King is in the same position as the Prime Minister, except that the King is supposedly above the law, and hence it is impossible for him to be guilty of outlawry.

The important point is this: That the women were at all times constitutional in their behavior when acting officially. As individuals they have protested against denials of constitutional recognition of their organization in various ways.

They have slashed pictures, broken shop windows, burned houses, and as the public knows, protested in every possible manner. Such form of protest is the only one possible to people who are outside the Constitution.

Ignored by the Press, unrepresented in the Government, they have no means of making their grievances felt except by actions which stir to attention people otherwise apathetic. If they did not do this, the struggle would be simply one between themselves and the Government of which the public at large would not be aware, and since the Government is obedient to the mandates of the people, the people must be stirred to give mandates sufficiently vehement to make the Government act.

The militants have aroused every class and every group into demanding that the Government take action with regard to votes for women—artists, by the destruction of pictures, public games, etc.; churchmen, by the destruction of churches; merchants, by the smashing of shop windows; the nobility by their interference with court functions; property owners, by the burning down of manors; and, in fact, every class, except those who have enrolled themselves on their side—the working class.

Their strategy is worthy of Napoleon. Of course, some of the groups I have mentioned are roused to demand only that the Government repress the women, by way of improving matters, but the majority of the people do not care how the Government solves the problem, provided only that they do something so that trade may be resumed and the normal life of England revert to its accustomed course.

Now, there is only one thing that the Government can do to solve the problem, and that is to grant votes to women. Nothing else will kill the idea and the character of its manifestation. They may torture and murder Mrs. Pankhurst and her daughters, imprison or deport every militant in England, and the question will not be solved.

As Mrs. Pankhurst says: "You cannot kill an idea," and for every militant tortured, dead or imprisoned, ten others arise to take her place. The movement, like every movement of truth and vitality, simply gains force through every attempt at suppression, so that the business and pleasure of England will remain in jeopardy until votes for women is assured. The King will not be able to take his morning ride in the park in comfort, nor hold his court, nor attend his dinner parties, nor shoot his pheasants, nor play his races. The Ministers are likewise "hobbled" in all their activities, and the people of England can never be certain that the next outbreak won't occur at their door.

every person who is alienated in sympathy by such outbreaks, there is one who is won over by the courage, the fortitude, the statesmanship and the determination of the women, and the spiritual force represented by this group outweighs a thousandfold that represented by its opponents.

It is this spiritual force that the Government is so afraid of; for when truth, righteous demands, vigor, vision, political sagacity and uncompromising courage are allied against them, the government that opposes is doomed. Even those who at first opposed the militants are obliged to admit their foresight and right thinking by adoption of their tactics. The constitutional suffragists who have condemned militancy, have nevertheless been condemned to revise their first condemnation of opposition to the Government, and are now themselves busily engaged in defeating government candidates.

In conjunction with their extraordinary political foresight, there exists an administrative and executive capacity, and a practical business shrewdness that have built up a fighting organization, which is unexcelled throughout history. Consider for a moment, what a vigorous element will be injected into English political life when these women are enfranchised. The argument that women should not vote because English militants are noisy and unpleasant is the silliest of all.

Let no one imagine that their actions do not require fortitude. Swarming into the army ranks and presenting a united front to the enemy is child's play in comparison. Alone, unarmed, unaided, the women make their protests—exposing themselves to the fury of the mob, the contempt of their neighbors and the most difficult of all oppositions—public ridicule. It is a rebellion titan in the proportions of the spiritual price that it represents. As one lusty cockney expressed it in Hyde Park, where the women were holding a meeting, "Go it—and Gawd bless the militants! They're the only folks left in England with a drop of John Bull blood in their veins." No wonder "God's Englishmen" of the bull-

dog, beef-eating, bullying variety are afraid. And I dare say that at the last ditch in the struggle, which, with characteristic doggedness, they recognize as inevitably victorious for the women, they will take to lynching. If it were not for that possibility among Englishmen there would be no militancy.

To be sure, there are men in England, gallant men, and many of them, who understand and are proud of and support the women in their struggle, but they are not included in the Government. The Government, as such, will only receive the quality of spiritual enlightenment it so strongly needs, when women as well as men are included in it. Being such as it is at present, it must be dealt with by methods that it understands. With the methods that Magna Chartists, Cromwell and American Colonists of '77, the Corn Rioters, and the Home Rulers have employed so successfully against it—it must be beaten and bullied into liberal and democratic action.

The women are not responsible for the rules of the political game, unless they themselves are able to lay down those rules; and that time, they must play politics according to the rules laid down by men.

And that is the finest thing about them. While deploring the necessity for militant activity, they have recognized that in the present political condition of things it is imperative, and have played the game according to alien rules, in a way that has made the whole world stop and look and listen, and consider their demands.

Incidentally, they have done so on the advice of a man—a statesman who, like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, knew his England. The late Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, when, as Prime Minister, he was approached by women with the suggestion that he handle their question in Parliament, replied: "My dear ladies, I would do so, being a hearty believer in votes for women, were your question one of practical politics. Take it out of the realm of philosophy and academic discussion, and make it such, and I will gladly deal with it."

"But how are we to do it, Sir Henry?" the women asked: "In the same fashion as men have done," he replied.

"And that is?" "Kick up a row." And they did. They took his advice. They kicked up a row. They have been kicking up a row ever since, and like the American Revolutionist, and the Home Ruler, they will only cease when they have kicked an obtuse government into recognition.

But whether or not one grants the political wisdom of militancy, one cannot help but admire the courage of the women in carrying through a programme which they believe the situation demands.

Think of the skill, daring, self-sacrifice and determination of Emily Davidson, who threw herself before the King's horse, in order to call His Majesty's attention to the outrages endured by women in His Majesty's prisons. What man has done more for a cause in which he believed? Think of the pluck of the little debutante, who in all the pomp and circumstance of a court function, dared to raise her voice to implore the King to have pity on women. She drew down upon herself the disapproval and contempt of family, friends and unsympathetic functionaries, who themselves were overawed by the "divinity that doth hedge a King" to the extent of considering such a pitiful little plea for mercy as a deadly insult to His Majesty.

Remember, too, the reply of the women who slashed pictures in order to compel attention to woman's demand, to the judge who sentenced her: "What are five pictures compared with 80,000 pictures by the Greatest Artists of all? What are five pictures in your gallery damaged gutter by your laws and your government men each night?"

These are the sort of women called "furies," "vandals," etc., by a time-serving press in England.