

Suffrage Meetings from Another Point of View.

I always think that no one has been converted at a Suffrage meeting except myself, whom the reasoned eloquence of Mrs. Pethick Lawrence induced to become a member of the W.S.P.U. As a rule, Suffrage and Temperance meetings seem to me to have this in common—everyone present has, so to speak, taken the pledge, or else has not the faintest idea of “signing,” and has come out of curiosity or for a little excitement. If you ask me, then, how so many thousands are drawn into the fold, I cannot tell: perhaps earnest friends wrestle with them in private; perhaps a perusal of Suffrage literature convinces them; perhaps the gibes of their male relatives drive them to a sturdy championship of the cause.

At all events what I hear and overhear from audiences at Suffrage meetings inclines me more and more to cling to the belief I have stated in my opening sentence. There is never any lack of interest in the remarks that are waffled to me while I stand in a long “queue” outside on the pavement, or sit, waiting for the speaker, inside on a hard bench. Last year, at one of Miss Christabel Pankhurst’s meetings, there was a very bold lady behind me, who was confiding to her friend in low and mysterious tones—provokingly low sometimes—that she had come without her husband’s permission. “You know, my dear,” she was saying, “He’s perfectly rabid—quite infuriated against the very name of Suffrage. Once or twice when I have attempted to argue with him, one of his bad attacks has come on and we had to call in the doctor. Actually when he discovered that I had bought that nice marmalade at the Suffrage Cake and Candy Sale he ordered me to throw it in the fire. I had to pretend to do it at the moment but, of course, he ate marmalade puddings till it was finished. One can always circumvent a man.”

Once a pale, anxious little woman, in a faded green frock, confided to me that she always came to Suffrage meetings when any of the “great guns” (thus she phrased it) were to be speaking, because she was a designer of dresses, and she gleaned ideas from the artistic gowns worn by some of the speakers. Listen to that, oh ye cartoonists of the comic papers, who, still in the dark backward and abysm of ignorance, represent the Suffragette as wearing clothes of the same hideous cut and pattern as the average Frenchman imagines are the garb of the Englishwoman on tour on the Continent!

Again, I heard two middle-aged women conversing behind me thus in a “queue” one bitterly cold winter evening—“Well, Mrs. McGavin,” said the first, “I am surprised to see you here! I

didn’t know you were interested in the Cause. My, wonders will never cease. I’d have put you down as an “anti-,” upon my word, I should.” Mrs. McGavin (at whom I stole a side glance) looked considerably embarrassed—“The fact is, Mrs. Martin,” she began hesitatingly, “I had nowhere to go to-night now that the Sewing Meeting’s stopped, and I’m *that* into the way of going out on Tuesdays that I just looked up the papers to see what was on, and here I am. I was once thinking of going to a lecture at our Church Literary on ‘Niagara with lime-light views,’ but these lectures are awful common now.” “So they are,” agreed Mrs. McGavin, heartily. “Suffrage is much more genteel. Limelight’s quite played out.”

But the most curious and interesting person I ever encountered at a Suffrage Meeting was a young man, fat and fair of countenance, who wore a strange and worried look. Seeing me perusing *Votes for Women* in the few minutes before the speaker appeared, he ventured, timidly, to ask me a question about one of the articles. From that he diverged with singular and startling rapidity to his own private affairs. In brief, he told me that he had been engaged to be married to a Suffragette, and that they had quarrelled over the vexed question of militant tactics. He, while believing in the cause, was violently opposed to force; she was a sturdy upholder of the fighting line and ready, as he told me almost tearfully, to go to prison. They had parted after one particularly acrimonious discussion. And he, having tried separation for a little, liked it not, and was now struggling, by a sedulous attendance at Suffrage Meetings and a careful perusal of *Votes for Women* week by week, to see her point of view. I noticed that he started nervously whenever one of the slim, white-robed young stewards approached us selling literature, and I guessed that he had dreaded and half hoped he might meet his Camilla. I hoped some night he would. Bottom was right when he said that reason and love keep little company together—however those of sterner stuff may deplore it. At least, I could not keep from admiring my disconsolate friend. He was earnestly striving to reach the light, and was grimly determined to speak the truth even at the cost of losing what meant most to him in life. He would not cozen himself into any false belief; how many of us would have displayed the same fortitude in similar circumstances? He provides the one thrill of romance I have ever felt at a Suffrage Meeting. I trust his story ended happily; that candid, blue eye of his, that chubby, pleasant face were never suited for the hero of a tragedy.

Only once have I heard a man speak at any length in public on Suffrage, and then it was one of the best known supporters of the cause. An exceedingly able but not fluent speaker, he was arguing at one point with the utmost lucidity and

acuteness, when an old gentleman behind me rose and said in a loud impatient whisper to an elderly lady who accompanied him, “I’m away, Jeanie! The women are far beyond this. I’d rather hear yon lad’s wife any day in the week. There’s no eloquence there.” And out he tramped. I may add that the “lad” in question would heartily have agreed with him, and has frequently expressed the opinion in my hearing that it is a hundred times more interesting to hear women on Suffrage than even the ablest man.

The other sex is, I find, as a whole, always ready to concede this, and what I enjoy most of all overhearing at a crowded Suffrage meeting are the delighted chuckles of the male portion of the audience over the points that the woman speaker makes, or her clever answers to awkward questions. It is a rare treat at any time to be present when Miss Christabel Pankhurst “squares” a heckler, and I am not ashamed to confess that this pleasure is always increased when a manly voice in my vicinity exclaims with keen enjoyment, “She had him there! My, that’s first rate. She’s always on the spot.”

Last year one enthusiastic gentleman in the gallery called out, with evident sincerity, at the end of a splendidly delivered indictment against the government, “By Jove! Wouldn’t they look small if they heard that?” I wondered!

My zealous friends in the cause constantly try to induce me to become a speaker myself. They try to persuade me that I am specially designed by Providence as an advocate of *Votes for Women*. I put them off with all kinds of specious excuses, but the real reason I have never had the courage to divulge, well knowing that I should at once be set down as a frivolous trifler.

There can be no harm, however, in revealing the secret here, and indeed it is exceedingly appropriate to do so.

I cannot bear to mount the platform because it would mean leaving the audience of which I love to form a part, which I love to study, and, if I am lucky, learn to know.

It is not they who carry the flags who see the best of the procession, and what I hear on the benches (low be it spoken) often interests me infinitely more than what I hear from the rostrum.

K. T. M.

The smile is mightier than the vote—so is the Tongue.

Life has two great tragedies. One is, not having what one wants; the other is, having it. Woman has no vote, that is Her Tragedy; Man has a vote, that is His.