

# EMMELINE PANKHURST

# CENTENARY 1858—1958

*On 4th July the Emmeline Pankhurst Centenary was celebrated in London, and the Black Sash was indeed honoured to be invited to take part in the proceedings. We were very lucky to be represented by three of our most steadfast and capable members, Mrs. Jessie Power, Miss Marjorie Juta and Mrs. Anna Marais. Mrs. Marais, who laid a wreath of S.A. flowers on behalf of the Black Sash, sent us this report:*

**W**HEN the vote came to women in South Africa it came as a gift, not as a reward after a struggle. But now that I, as one of these South African women, have had the privilege to be present at the Pankhurst Centenary, I feel as if I have in some small measure experienced the thrill of the wonderful battle these women of Britain fought.

The proceedings started with an At Home in the Members' dining-room of the House of Commons. I went with Mrs. Jessie Power and met Miss Marjorie Juta there. We were received by four women M.P.'s (Viscountess Davidson, Mrs. Jean Mann, Dr. Edith Summerskill and Dame Irene Ward), and had a splendid red-coated official to a-call-a-our-names-a. As one of the members said, "How nice for women to be shown in instead of being shown out." A most illustrious gathering of women both old and young! But those that struck me most were the contemporaries of E. Pankhurst. They fell into two distinct types—the dear little Dresden China women wearing soft pinks and blues and the positive dreadnoughts wearing whatever they wanted to, and if they wanted to—all of them showing the ravages of the years in their bodies, their hands, their faces, but all of them with eyes that are incredibly young and still reflecting the light of battle—most refreshing faces. The M.P.s spoke of the disabilities women suffered in the past, of the Pankhurst fight, of the steady progress being made towards equality (the latest achievement being women peers) and of the need for greater progress. "Why," said M.P. Mrs. Jean Mann, "when there are 30 women members in the House and we seek to take part in a debate should we be told that **one** woman had already been allowed to speak?"

As the first woman member in the House, Nancy Lady Ascot brought forth gales of laughter with her description of entering the House for the first time: "I had on one side Lloyd George, on the other Balfour, and they were both trembling because they were both thoroughly ashamed of what they were doing."

From the House we went to Mrs. Pankhurst's statue, standing in a corner which is overshadowed by the magnificent Victoria Tower and is sheltered from the road by large plane trees—a womanly figure standing there in dignity and beauty but showing clearly the ravages of illness (after all she was

50 when she first went to prison). There we gathered, the old campaigners with the green, white and purple suffragette scarves and badges and a flag, a sprinkling of men (some had been fellow jailbirds), younger women, relations, women from the far-off Commonwealth countries—all to pay informal tribute with floral tokens to her memory. Our South African flowers had not come in time, but I found some small Jakob Regops (soos die kleintjies wat ons in die veld sien groei) and blue agapanthus which were woven into a charming sheaf: "To the memory of E. Pankhurst, The Black Sash—South Africa—Die Swart Serp—Suid-Afrika" was pinned on to the black ribbon.

The evening meeting, with Mrs. Pankhurst's niece, Miss Enid Goulden Back, in the chair, gave women from Commonwealth countries who had not fought the good fight a chance to express their views on the impact of Mrs. Pankhurst's work on themselves and their countries. From South Africa Mrs. Davie (widow of Dr. Davie) spoke on behalf of the N.C.W.



**Mrs. Anna Marais (extreme left) laying the Black Sash sheaf at the foot of the statue to Emmeline Pankhurst.**

in Cape Town, and I spoke as an individual and also as a member of the Black Sash. The point they liked best was when I said that the Black Sash, by realising the responsibilities attached to the privilege of voting, were really building on the foundations laid by Mrs. Pankhurst when we strove to encourage our citizens to shoulder those responsibilities. Lord Pethick-Lawrence spoke stirringly of his sufferings with the women (he was force fed). Her Excellency Begum Ikramullah from Pakistan and Mrs. Casinader from Ceylon both paid tribute most charmingly. But what I liked best of all were the short incidents the old fighters recalled in a few sentences. All illustrated the tremendous influence Mrs. Pankhurst had on them. Little blue-eyed Miss Mayo,

who said speeches were not in her line, Alderman Dorothy Bowker, with her male haircut and suit, waving a lorgnette which had been given her by Mrs. Pankhurst, Miss Eileen Casey (bent almost double) who told of the football games which she played in prison without her long skirts and for which reason Mrs. Pankhurst called her "boy," and so many more memories as living now as at the time, perhaps more so now, because their shining eyes tell of their pride in the good fight well fought.

I could only come to the conclusion that blessed are those who have had and have seized such an opportunity in their lives.

ANNA MARAIS.

## VRYHEID — EN SY EISE

**D**IE vryheid bring vir die mens op elke lewensterrein verantwoordelikheid mee. Sonder verantwoordelikheid word alle vryheid gewone losbandigheid. Dit geld kinders en ouer mense, individue sowel as mensegroepe of hele volke. As die vryheid nie deur verantwoordelikheid gedra en getemper word nie, ruk dit hand uit en word wildheid.

Nie een van ons wil die vryheid verloor nie. Laat ons dan met verantwoordelikheid teenoor ons medemens en God optree.

Ek wil vanmôre die lyn op één lewensterrein so effens deurtrek: die vryheid van diskussie of meningsuiting.

Hierdie vryheid is vir die meeste van ons in Suid-Afrika so vanselfsprekend dat ons die geleentheid om 'n saak te bespreek, beskou as normale deel van die wêreld se sosiale struktuur. In werklikheid is hierdie vryheid egter die navrug van 'n geweldige geestelike verowering. In groot gebiede van die wêreld en deur lang tydperke van die geskiedenis het kollektiwismes geheers wat niks geken het behalwe die verveligheid van die alleenpraak nie.

Geslagtelank was die blote gedagte dat 'n individu reg kon wees in 'n meningsverskil met die gesamentlike mening van die kollektiwiteit, vir die massas van die aarde haas ondenkbaar. En dit is nie moeilik om te sien dat ons, die mense van die wêreld, weer 'n tydperk binnegaan waar ons alles in die werk sal moet stel om hierdie fundamentele waarheid te handhaaf nie.

In sekere Europese lande word godsdienstige vryheid vandag al aan bande gelê terwille van „nasionale eenheid,” in die Islamitiese lande was godsdiensvryheid maar nog altyd eintlik 'n blote min of meer gedwonge toegewing; die ware, volle burger is alleen hy wat in die „geloof” staan. In lande onder die Sowjet het die alleenspraak deur kommunistiese oorheersing vorms aangeneem wat vir ons amusant sou wees as hulle nie so tragies was en ons gewaarsku het van 'n dreigende gevaar van geestelike slawerny nie.

Waarom moet ons as gelowiges ons uiterste doen om die reg van vrye diskussie te handhaaf? Nie

alleen omdat die waarheid dikwels in die lig tree uit die konflik van menings nie. Dit is in der waarheid dikwels die geval, selfs 'n geopenbaarde skrifwaarheid registreer dikwels eers by ons of neem 'n voller, ryker betekenis aan na gedagtewisseling en bespreking daaroor. So word nuwe insigte dikwels in die groot waarheid gebore en vensters vir ons oopgeskuif om dieper in te kyk in die skeppings- en genadewerk van God.

Maar ons het veral vryheid van meningsuiting nodig omdat die alleenspraak lei na solipsisme, met ander woorde dit sluit die beweging, die party, die staat of die kerk in 'n geweldige eensaamheid in.

Die bekende woorde van lord Acton hou nog 'n nuttige waarskuwing in: „All power corrupts us, and absolute power corrupts us absolutely.”

Daarom sal geen kollektiwiteit wat alle opposisie uitskakel of stilmaak, korrupsie vryspring nie. Ons as mense is so gemaak dat ons weerspreek moet word of ons ontaard en word bandeloos en maak ons wil absoluut.

Tereg het 'n groot Europese kerkman onlangs gesê: „Ons het vryheid van spraak nodig, nie omdat die mens so wys is dat ons noodwendig deur bespreking die waarheid vind nie, maar omdat ons mense so boos en so dwaas is dat indien ons nie weerspreek word nie, ons ons eie stemme sal aansien vir die stem van God.”

Maar vir ons as gelowiges en burgers van 'n land waar vryheid heers, lê dit ook hierdie ekstra besef op van ons verantwoordelikheid om eerstens in beginsel vir vrye meningsuiting te staan maar daarby te waak dat ook dit nie ontaard in losbandigheid nie. Om Sy seëninge vir die individu en in land en volk te lewer, moet die vryheid op elke lewensterrein bepaal en gekenmerk word deur voortdurende waaksamheid.

Deur die Prediker—Dagbreek.

What is nationalism? It is an ignoble patriotism exaggerated till it has lost all meaning, which bears the same relation to the noble and healthy mind as the fixed idea of an imbecile to normal convictions

—Dr. A. Schweitzer.