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Sandra Stanley Holton

The American Historical Review, Vol. 99, No. 4. (Oct., 1994), pp. 1112-1136.

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“To Educate Women into Rebellion”: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the Creation of a Transatlantic Network of Radical Suffragists

SANDRA STANLEY HOLTON

IN THE 1880S AND EARLY 1890s, Elizabeth Cady Stanton made three extended visits from the United States to Britain and Europe. During this decade, she spent in all some five years living in England, where her daughter, Harriot Stanton Blatch, had married. In this time, she renewed and extended friendships first made during a wedding tour in 1840, and she and her daughter became central figures in a transatlantic friendship network. This was a network that in Britain drew substantially on a kinship circle of women connected with the Brights, a radical reforming Quaker family among whom was the statesman, John Bright. Women of the Bright circle had helped in the formation of every major society and campaign on which the organized women's movement in Britain had been built in the late 1860s.¹

The Bright circle also provided an important locus of radical suffragism in Britain. At the time of Elizabeth Cady Stanton's return to Britain in the 1880s, however, a moderate current of suffrage opinion dominated the movement there, one whose viewpoint until recently has also informed prevailing understandings of British suffragism during the nineteenth century.² Because the more moderate

I would like to thank the University of Adelaide and the Australian Research Council for awarding me research fellowships in 1990 and 1992, allowing me the freedom to undertake the research presented here, and also the Australian Academy of the Humanities, the Australian Research Council, the Ian Potter Foundation, and the University of Adelaide, each of which during this period provided support for the necessary travel. Earlier versions of this article were presented at the 1992 conference of the Australian and New Zealand American Studies Association in Adelaide, and the “Suffrage and Beyond” conference in Wellington in 1993, held to mark the centennial of the enfranchisement of women in New Zealand.

¹ Elizabeth Cady Stanton was in England from October 1882 to November 1883, from November 1886 to March 1888, and from March 1890 to August 1891. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *Eighty Years and More: Reminiscences, 1815–1897* (1898; rpt. edn., New York, 1970), chaps. 12, 16, 27, recounts these visits; and see also *Elizabeth Cady Stanton, as Revealed in Her Letters Diary and Reminiscences*, Theodore Stanton and Harriot Stanton Blatch, eds., 2 vols. (New York, 1922), 2: 196–213, 233–50, 262–79, which reproduces extracts from her diary for these periods. I look at some other aspects of her friendship with the Bright circle in my essay “From Anti-Slavery to Suffrage Militancy: The Bright Circle, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the British Women's Movement,” in *Suffrage and Beyond: International Feminist Perspectives*, Melanie Nolan and Caroline Daley, eds. (Auckland, forthcoming).

² I have deliberately not applied the term “conservative” here to denote opposition to the Radical-Liberal approach to suffrage. Although there were prominent British suffragists who might rightly be so described, for example, Emily Davies and Frances Power Cobbe, the conflicts discussed in this article were fiercest among liberal suffragists, and so I adopt the terms “radical” and “moderate” to indicate points on a continuum of advanced opinion, while “Radical-Liberal” is used

leadership also provided the early chronicles of the movement, these contain little evidence of either this friendship network or the alternative radical perspective on suffrage that it represented.³ The memoirs of American suffragists, together with the correspondence between members of this network, more of which has recently come to light, provide, in contrast, suggestive evidence on both its extent and nature.⁴

An examination of such evidence together with a reconstruction of this network serves to advance our understanding of radical suffragism in a number of ways. To begin with, it brings into focus clearly for the first time an alternative suffrage leadership among Radical-Liberal circles in Britain in the latter part of the nineteenth century and so broadens our picture of the varieties within suffragism, as well as some of the intellectual and social roots, hitherto neglected, of those varieties.⁵ In particular, it points to a continuing transatlantic legacy from the abolition movement in terms of a Garrisonian conception of the reformer's role.

to indicate affiliation to a particular current within liberal opinion. For a detailed comparison of some leading conservative and liberal suffragists, see Barbara Caine, *Victorian Feminists* (New York, 1991).

³ Millicent Garrett Fawcett, "England," in *The Woman Question in Europe*, Theodore Stanton, ed. (New York, 1884), 1–29; Helen Blackburn, *Women's Suffrage: A Record of the Women's Suffrage Movement in the British Isles, with Biographical Sketches of Miss Becker* (London, 1902); and "Great Britain: Efforts for the Parliamentary Franchise," in Susan B. Anthony and Ida Husted Harper, *History of Woman Suffrage*, vol. 4 (1886; rpt. edn., New York, 1970), 1012–25; Millicent Garrett Fawcett, *Women's Suffrage: A Short History of a Great Movement* (London [1912]). Occasional references to members of the Bright circle as individuals are to be found in each of these standard histories, especially those who maintained good relations with the moderate leaders, such as Priscilla Bright McLaren and Liliash Ashworth Hallett, but Bertha Mason, *The Story of the Women's Suffrage Movement* (London, 1912), suggests more clearly their existence as a coherent circle that provided significant leadership to the movement at various times. More recently, Patricia Hollis, *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government, 1865–1914* (Oxford, 1987); and Philippa Levine, *Feminist Lives in Victorian England: Private Roles and Public Commitment* (Oxford, 1990), both note the existence of this circle of women reformers.

⁴ E. Stanton, *Eighty Years*; T. Stanton and Blatch, *E. C. Stanton*; Ida Husted Harper, *Life and Work of Susan B. Anthony*, 3 vols. (Indianapolis, 1898–1908); Harriot Stanton Blatch and Alma Lutz, *Challenging Years: The Memoirs of Harriot Stanton Blatch* (New York, 1940). Most of the correspondence between Elizabeth Cady Stanton and members of the Bright circle drawn on here is in the form of transcripts bound together as "Elizabeth Cady Stanton Correspondence" in the Mabel Smith Douglass Library, Douglass and Smith Colleges, the State University of New Jersey, Rutgers (hereafter, ECSC), and I am grateful to the library for allowing me to quote from and cite this collection and to Keith Jones for background information concerning it. Patricia Holland of the Elizabeth Cady Stanton–Susan B. Anthony microfilm project originally located this material for me and provided the photocopies from which I worked. I am also grateful to Patricia Holland for reading an earlier version of this article and alerting me to some errors. My attention was first drawn to this topic when researching the Millfield Papers, in the private Clark family archive, C. and J. Clark, Street, Somerset, UK (hereafter, MP), where letters from Elizabeth Cady Stanton to some of her British network came to light, copies of which have since been deposited with the microfilm project. I am grateful to Richard Clark for permission to research in and draw upon this collection and to Jean Brook of the Museum and Archives, C. and J. Clark, for her help in this work.

⁵ Radicals formed a loose grouping on the left of the Liberal Party between the 1860s and 1890s, held together by their commitment to the ideas of John Stuart Mill. They had some significant links with popular radicalism, especially with republicans and freethinkers, and were a notable presence within the early organizations of the British women's movement, although, again, their presence as a distinct, coherent current of opinion has been largely ignored. See Sandra Stanley Holton, "Free Love and Victorian Feminism: The Divers Matrimonials of Elizabeth Wolstenholme and Ben Elmy," *Victorian Studies*, 37 (Winter 1994): 1–25. For background on the Radicals, see Roy Jenkins, *Sir Charles Dilke: A Victorian Tragedy* (London, 1958); Edward Royle, *Radicals, Secularists and Republicans: Popular Free-Thought in Britain, 1866–1915* (Manchester, 1980); Eugenio F. Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment, and Reform: Popular Liberalism in the Age of Gladstone, 1860–1880* (Cambridge, 1992).

It suggests, also, Elizabeth Cady Stanton's part in keeping alive that legacy among British suffragists. In emphasizing the need "to educate women into rebellion," she sought to foster an uncompromising and confrontational approach to the emancipation of her sex. She consistently advised her British colleagues against pragmatic retreats determined by what was thought achievable in terms of franchise reform. Instead, she advised a broadened formulation of the demand for the vote, one more consistent with the conception of the citizenship of women she shared with radical suffragists in Britain.

Central to this conception was the ending of coverture, the doctrine that subsumed the legal personality of wives under that of their husbands. In recent years, Carole Pateman has argued that marriage in modern Western societies forms part of a sexual contract fundamental to the subordination of women in civil society. Although the analysis of marriage offered by the nineteenth-century women's movement lacked the coherence and power of modern accounts, radical suffragism did share many of its concerns. The robbing of women upon marriage of both their property and their rights over their own bodies made impossible the autonomous self-development of the individual, which for Radical-Liberal suffragists was an essential part of true citizenship. The position of the married woman provided for them, therefore, the fullest measure of women's subordination, and the end of coverture was given an importance equal to enfranchisement in their efforts to secure the citizenship of women. Hence the inclusion of married women in the demand for the vote became almost an article of faith for Radical-Liberal suffragists in Britain.⁶ It was this that set them at odds with the national suffrage leadership. There, a more moderate stance was adopted, one that sought to concentrate only on breaking down the sexual exclusiveness of the franchise laws as the first essential step to citizenship and that saw the ending of coverture as subordinate to that goal. From such a perspective, single women would form the vanguard for their sex, while married women might be excluded from the demand if their exclusion increased the likelihood of gaining the franchise for some women. From this perspective, too, the Radical-Liberal approach endangered the cause, for it challenged the prevailing sexual order in ways that more moderate suffragists thought impolitic.⁷

Elizabeth Cady Stanton's first and most forceful intervention in the British movement concerned this question, and her intervention was subsequently linked to the formation of a new suffrage society in 1889, the Women's Franchise

⁶ Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford, Calif., 1988), esp. ix, 3–6, and chaps. 5–6; compare with the accounts of nineteenth-century analyses of marriage in Levine, *Feminist Lives*, chap. 3; Susan Kingsley Kent, *Sex and Suffrage in Britain, 1860–1914* (Princeton, N.J., 1987), chap. 3. Lee Holcombe, *Wives and Property: Reform of the Married Women's Property Law in Nineteenth Century England* (Toronto, 1983); Mary Lyndon Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage and the Law in Victorian England 1850–1895* (Princeton, 1989); and Holton, "Free Love," all emphasize the importance of the question of coverture for the nineteenth-century suffrage movement.

⁷ Because all the early histories were written from the moderate perspective, the works of Helen Blackburn, Millicent Garrett Fawcett, or Bertha Mason, for example (see n. 2), offer no detailed analysis of this major source of discord among British suffragists and occasionally may even mislead; for example, Fawcett, "England," 5, gives the impression that the suffrage movement in Britain held continuously to the simple equal rights formulation supported by J. S. Mill, although in fact from 1874 the national leadership repeatedly retreated to a more limited formulation that explicitly excluded married women.

League. A focus on her friendship network, then, draws attention also to a previously neglected body. The league gave expression to the radical suffragism that had been promoted by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Harriot Stanton Blatch over the preceding few years and provided a clear continuation of the Garrisonian legacy within the British movement. More specifically, the league was determined to maintain the inclusion of married women in the suffrage demand, and the story of the league's formation clarifies the nature of the tensions and splits that occurred in the British movement in 1888–1889. These splits were understandably glossed over in early histories of the movement, which were to some extent also campaign literature, in which the disclosure of old controversies would not have been helpful.⁸ But the effect of such neglect has been to marginalize, when it does not conceal, a continuous radical current that left a significant legacy for the twentieth-century movement in both Britain and the United States.

From the 1890s on, the Women's Franchise League promoted a fresh conception of women's claims to citizenship based on their labor, both paid and unpaid. Harriot Stanton Blatch helped develop this approach and subsequently took it back to the United States. The methods and orientation of the Women's Franchise League also prefigured new directions taken by the British movement in the early twentieth century, notably in the links it attempted to build with the labor and socialist movements.⁹ Further, the league provided Emmeline Pankhurst with her apprenticeship as a suffrage leader. Aspects of the league's history suggest, then, certain continuities between nineteenth-century radical suffragism and the militancy of the twentieth-century movement, at least in its initial forms, continuities that the current conceptualizations of suffrage history do not acknowledge.

Ellen Carol DuBois has recently described the women's movement as "a self-consciously transnational popular political movement." She has also questioned existing characterizations of nineteenth-century suffrage movements as generally "conservative," pointing to the valuable links that were forged in Britain, the United States, and elsewhere between the middle-class women's movement and socialist and labor movements.¹⁰ An examination of the activities

⁸ It is noteworthy that E. Stanton, *Eighty Years*, chap. 14, devotes a whole chapter to marriage in relation to women's rights, while the early histories of the British movement by Blackburn, Fawcett, and Mason (see n. 2), written from the perspective of the moderate leadership, completely ignore the Women's Franchise League, and subsequent historians have in general made at most a passing reference to its existence. E. Sylvia Pankhurst gives it the greatest prominence in her autobiographical work *The Suffragette Movement: An Intimate Account of Persons and Ideals* (1931; rpt. edn., London, 1977), when discussing the role of her parents in the nineteenth-century movement. The most substantial recent account is David Rubinstein, *Before the Suffragettes: Women's Emancipation in the 1890s* (Brighton, 1986), 143–45, which focuses on its first few years and somewhat underestimates the actual lifetime of the league.

⁹ This aspect of the twentieth-century suffrage campaign is discussed in more detail in Sandra Stanley Holton, *Feminism and Democracy: Women's Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain 1900–1918* (Cambridge, 1986).

¹⁰ Ellen Carol DuBois, "Woman Suffrage and the Left: An Internationalist Socialist-Feminist Perspective," *New Left Review*, 186 (1991): 20–45, esp. 20, 22. DuBois explores other aspects of these links between the British and American movements in "Working Class Women, Class Relations, and Suffrage Militance: Harriot Stanton Blatch and the New York Woman Suffrage Movement, 1894–1909," in *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women's History*, Ellen Carol DuBois and

of the Women's Franchise League, and the transatlantic current of radical suffragism on which it drew, offers further confirmation for such arguments. But, more than this, it helps clarify the social-political basis for such links in a long-established and vigorous radical current within the middle-class women's movement. It suggests also an ideological basis for such a relation in a fresh formulation of the claim for citizenship that emphasized a communion of middle-class and working-class women in their shared labor, both productive and reproductive. Finally, it demonstrates the complex exchange of ideas and approaches that occurred among radical suffragists in Britain and the United States.

ELIZABETH CADY STANTON'S connections to the groups out of which was to grow the radical wing of the British women's movement went back to 1840. The World Anti-Slavery Convention met that year in London, and one of the American delegates was Henry Stanton, whom she had just married. After the convention, the couple took a tour of Britain and came to know some of the most prominent reform families of the day, especially among the Quakers, who were often their hosts.¹¹ It was in this way that Elizabeth Cady Stanton formed some of the friendships she revived when she returned to Britain for a series of visits in the 1880s. Contact between reformers in Britain and the United States had increased in the intervening years, encouraging a further exchange of radical ideas between the two continents. It was in these circles that William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass gradually began to find adherents among British abolitionists, for example. Very often, these friendships carried over into subsequent generations, with the children of Garrison visiting and playing host to the children and grandchildren of friends made by their parents while in Britain many decades earlier.¹²

The Priestmans of Newcastle were one of the Quaker families with whom the Stantons stayed while touring Britain, a family active at this time in both the temperance and abolition movements. Their eldest daughter, Elizabeth Priestman, had recently married a young Quaker radical from Rochdale, John Bright, whose part in the campaign against church rates had already brought him to the

Vicki L. Ruiz, eds. (New York, 1990), 176–94; and DuBois, "Spanning Two Centuries: The Autobiography of Nora Stanton Barney," *History Workshop*, 22 (1986): 131–52.

¹¹ This visit was also especially significant for the formation of an organized movement for women's rights in America, since it marked the beginning of the friendship between Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, which resulted in the Seneca Falls convention of 1848. See Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*, vol. 1 (1881; rpt. edn., New York, 1976), 50. Kathryn Kish Sklar, "Women Who Speak for an Entire Nation: American and British Women Compared at the World Anti-Slavery Convention, London 1840," *Pacific Historical Review*, 59 (1990): 453–99, provides an illuminating comparison of the effect of this event on the formation of a women's movement in both countries. DuBois, "Woman Suffrage," 25, suggests that a radicalizing influence on Elizabeth Cady Stanton was her introduction to Chartism during her first visit to Britain.

¹² See, for example, Mary Priestman to Anna Maria Priestman, October 15, 1846; Alice Clark to Priscilla Bright McLaren, August 2, 1897, July 11, 1901, and to the Priestman sisters, May 19, 1907, and August 30, 1910, Boxes 14 and 75 respectively, MP. Priscilla Bright McLaren and a close friend of the Priestman sisters, Mary Estlin, were also among the early supporters of Garrison in Britain. See Duncan Rice, *The Scots Abolitionists 1833–61* (Baton Rouge, La., 1981), 48, 178–79.

fore in local politics. Even though Elizabeth Priestman died from consumption shortly thereafter, the links between the two families survived, most notably through the care of her baby daughter, Helen Priestman Bright. The aunts in the Priestman and Bright families shared the young child's care, as her father joined the anti-Corn Law campaign then under way, a campaign on which he based his subsequent political career as "tribune of the people." The Anti-Corn Law campaign also provided many middle-class women, including John Bright's sisters and sisters-in-law, with their first experience of politics.¹³

John Bright himself was never a reliable supporter of women's rights, and on occasion he openly declared his opposition to women's suffrage. But his first marriage helped form a Quaker sisterhood that played an important role in the women's movement in Britain.¹⁴ This circle of female kin included his sisters Priscilla Bright McLaren and Margaret Bright Lucas, sister-in-law Ursula Mellor Bright (married to Jacob, younger brother of John), and Margaret Tanner, Mary Priestman, and Anna Maria Priestman (all sisters of Elizabeth Priestman), together with their daughters, stepdaughters, daughters-in-law, and nieces, among whom were Helen Priestman Bright Clark, Agnes McLaren, Eva McLaren, Laura McLaren, Liliash Ashworth Hallett, Anne Cross, and Kate Thomasson.¹⁵ As in the United States, Quaker women such as these played a noteworthy role in Britain in both the Garrisonian wing of the abolition movement and the formation of an organized

¹³ George Macaulay Trevelyan, *The Life of John Bright* (London, 1913), 34–43; John Travis Mills, *John Bright and the Quakers*, 2 vols. (London, 1935), 1: 383–94; Keith Robbins, *John Bright* (London, 1979), 19–27. The importance of the Anti-Corn Law League as a training ground for women's rights campaigners is a commonplace in the British literature; see, for example, Ray Strachey, *The Cause: A Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain* (1928; rpt. edn., London, 1978), 32, although it has yet to receive detailed investigation.

¹⁴ Although the importance of Quaker women is routinely acknowledged in the standard histories of the British women's movement, it has not received the same detailed analysis given to the American case. It is likely that there are some major points of difference between the two countries. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, for one, found English Quakers far more conservative than their American counterparts, especially in comparison with Hicksite Quakers such as Lucretia Mott, who was received with notable reserve by leading British Quakers in 1840 but met with a sympathetic response among British Unitarians; see E. Stanton, *Eighty Years*, 82–86; *James and Lucretia Mott: Life and Letters*, Anna Davis Hallowell, ed. (Boston, 1884), 170–79, 187–90; *Mary Howitt: An Autobiography*, Margaret Howitt, ed. (1889; London, 1891), 151–52. On the attitude of the London Yearly Meeting to the Hicksites, see Edwin B. Bronner, "The Other Branch": *London Yearly Meeting and the Hicksites 1827–1912* (London, 1975). The Chartist Quaker and suffragist Anne Knight provides a notable exception to this picture; see Gail Malmgreen, "Anne Knight and the Radical Subculture," *Quaker History*, 71 (1982): 11. For a more general account of British Quakers in this period, see Elizabeth Allo Isichei, *Victorian Quakers* (Oxford, 1970). Compare with the role of Hicksite women in radicalizing the American women's rights movement detailed in Nancy A. Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822–1872* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1984); and "Feminist Friends: Agrarian Quakers and the Emergence of Woman's Rights in America," *Feminist Studies*, 12 (1986): 27–49; Blanche Glassman Hersh, *The Slavery of Sex: Feminist-Abolitionists in America* (Urbana, Ill., 1978), 131–32, 145–48.

¹⁵ Ursula Mellor Bright herself was not a Quaker, and the advanced liberal outlook of her husband, Jacob Bright, led him to resign from the Society of Friends. Priscilla Bright McLaren was disowned for not marrying according to the practices of the Quakers, but this judgment was rescinded after the death of her husband. In naming the women of this circle, I follow the form that the individual concerned appears to have preferred. Some chose, like their American friends, to combine their single name with their husband's name, Helen Priestman Bright Clark even retaining also her mother's single name, while others did not follow this practice. Ursula Mellor Bright tended to use the polite form of the day, "Mrs Jacob Bright," in public, while usually signing herself Ursula M. Bright in letters.

women's movement during the 1860s. The Bright circle became an influential presence in a radical current within the women's movement in Britain, one that adopted a Garrisonian approach to campaigning.

DuBois has suggested that the Garrisonian conception of the task of reformers as "the agitation of public sentiment" was one of the abolition movement's main contributions to the cause of women's suffrage. She has also argued that Elizabeth Cady Stanton was the suffrage leader who transferred to the women's movement the consistently uncompromising stance of the Garrisonians with regard to ultimate ends. The question of the means by which such ends were to be achieved, in contrast, was work that should be left to politicians. For the reformer, there could be no retreat from principle or reduction of ultimate goals.¹⁶ And this was certainly also the essence of the advice Stanton gave to British colleagues on a number of occasions.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton's diary for her first return to Britain in 1882–1883 indicates a progression from the home of one member of the Bright kinship circle to another. The interests of these women, as of Radical-Liberal suffragists more generally, encompassed women's education, married women's property rights, entry to the medical profession, repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, the women's temperance movement, and, of course, women's suffrage. One or more of them had been involved in the founding of each of the first major suffrage societies in Manchester, London, Edinburgh, and Bristol. They were linked by kinship with numerous male politicians and reformers. At one point, for example, Priscilla Bright McLaren was declared "the best represented woman in the Kingdom," having six of her closest male kin in the House of Commons.¹⁷

Elizabeth Cady Stanton's first return was also the occasion of the marriage of Harriot Stanton to an Englishman, and one of her aims, evidently, was to find mentors for her daughter within the women's movement in Britain. She wrote to Anna Maria Priestman, telling of her daughter and declaring, "I hope much of her in the future as wifehood and motherhood rightly considered are a means of development." Toward the end of this stay in England, Stanton wrote again to the Priestman sisters, this time with a more direct request: "I want you all to know the daughter I leave behind me, and help her to earnest work, in all the great reforms for the development of humanity."¹⁸

Life in Basingstoke, the provincial market town outside London where Harriot Stanton Blatch now had her home, was clearly a strain for both mother and daughter. Elizabeth Cady Stanton told Anna Maria Priestman that they found it "a very benighted conservative town . . . in fact we find ourselves quite alone in all our radical ideas, on many points." Only among the most advanced circles in Britain did they find a recognition of their own sense of national identity as American radical republicans. And these British circles, in turn, had long looked

¹⁶ Ellen Carol DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America 1848–1869* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1978), 39.

¹⁷ Blackburn, *Women's Suffrage: A Record*, 64, notes that in the 1886 Parliament she had a husband, two sons, two brothers, and a nephew in the House of Commons; T. Stanton and Blatch, *E. C. Stanton*, 2: 196–213; E. Stanton, *Eighty Years*, 352–75.

¹⁸ Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Miss Priestman, January 30, postmark 1883; Elizabeth Cady Stanton to "Dear Widow and Spinsters," October 30 [1883], Box 23, MP.

to their relationship with American revolutionaries and reformers to confirm their own identity as radicals. But many of the institutions and conventions that for British reformers were simply an accustomed part of the political context in which they had to work proved trying for their American friends. On her first visit to the House of Commons, for example, Elizabeth Cady Stanton recorded that women were restricted to a "high perch" in the topmost gallery behind a wire grille. In consequence, she remembered, she and her feather-bedecked companions had appeared to her son, in the freedom of other observation galleries, like exotic caged birds.¹⁹

At times, different national manners and conventions put the British and American suffragists somewhat at odds. Elizabeth Cady Stanton's forceful anti-clericalism and radical theology could occasion unease among her hosts, since British radicals, even among these Quaker women, were used to greater respect for the authority of the church. When Stanton began work on her last great project, the *Woman's Bible*, several of her friends among the Bright circle responded cautiously at first, although a number of its members subsequently became part of the international committee through which she sought to establish the legitimacy of her task.²⁰

The monarchy presented perhaps the most alien aspect of British society. Elizabeth Cady Stanton noted wryly, for example: "The Queen is referred to tenderly in most of the speeches although she has never done anything to merit the approbation of the advocates of suffrage for women." She and Harriot Stanton Blatch refused to contribute to a fund for the queen's Golden Jubilee in 1887, expressing their disapproval of a rich woman who would take the pennies of the poor to build yet more monstrous memorials to her dead husband. Such sentiments would undoubtedly have been shared by many of her friends among the Radical-Liberal suffragists, at least some of whom had republican sympathies. Even the more cautious members of this circle, such as Priscilla Bright McLaren, apologized for the backwardness of her British colleagues and the conservatism of British public opinion and national institutions. "I do not think it is possible for you, with your wide unprejudiced views, thoroughly to comprehend our position here . . . we should be running our heads against a wall were we to go in all at once for all the rights you advocate." It was for this reason, she argued, that British

¹⁹ Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Miss Priestman, January 30, postmark 1883, Box 23, MP; E. Stanton, *Eighty Years*, 361. Among the leadership of the early women's movement in Britain, both Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon and Bessie Rayner Parkes, for example, were raised within that current of British radicalism that had supported the American Revolution. Their forebears had been among those who incorporated into their radicalism a notion of the "freeborn" Briton, a "patriot" identity that only began to be captured from the 1860s on by an imperialistic jingoism of the Right. See Hugh Cunningham, "The Language of Patriotism," in *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of the British National Identity*, Raphael Samuel, ed., 3 vols. (London, 1989), 1: 57-89; E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge, 1990), 120-25.

²⁰ E. Stanton, *Eighty Years*, 372, 397; see T. Stanton and Blatch, *E. C. Stanton*, 2: 206-07, for an account of Elizabeth Cady Stanton's visit to Helen Priestman Bright Clark, when it was feared that she "had shocked all the saints and clergy" in expressing to a local clergyman her forthright views on the meaning of the Bible; Ursula Bright to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, September 18 [1886?]; Priscilla Bright McLaren to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, November 12, 1886, both ECSC, Douglass Library; see also Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Anna Maria Priestman, November 8 [1886], and to Mary Priestman, October 21, 1895, both Box 23, MP. The latter mentions Ursula Bright and her niece Kate Thomasson in connection with the *Woman's Bible*.

suffragists had to proceed more slowly. "You must forgive me, dear, noble, clear-minded friend, if I cannot knock down at once all our Old World fences. We must creep under them, or climb over them as best we can."²¹

Other British suffragists, however, exhibited no such ambivalence toward their own national heritage. Indeed, figures such as Millicent Garrett Fawcett, with whom Elizabeth Cady Stanton also enjoyed friendly relations, occasionally displayed a sense of superiority deriving at least in part from her national identity as a Briton. She consistently exhibited an unbending, not to say parochial, adherence to British constitutional forms as models of moderation and stability from which she evidently believed the rest of the world could learn much. She took the opportunity for smug national self-congratulation, for example, when asked to contribute to Theodore Stanton's 1884 collection of essays on the women's movement in Europe, emphasizing "practical good sense and moderation" as the distinguishing feature of the British women's movement. She also expressed on occasion her resistance to links between the suffrage movements in Britain and America, refusing to accept the office of president of the International Congress of Women in 1888 with the remark, it was "quite impossible that English women and American women should have anything in common, the conditions of their lives and the purposes of their respective societies being so different."²²

In some British suffrage circles, then, her American identity might lend Elizabeth Cady Stanton additional credibility, while in others it was, no doubt, something to be excused. Social styles evidently were very different, too. Elizabeth Cady Stanton felt it necessary, after a visit to the Priestman sisters, to apologize in case she and her daughter "overflowed too freely when with you." She explained, "our visit to you was like water to the weary traveller crossing a vast desert," after life in Basingstoke, where "there is not one with whom we can commune with freedom and pleasure, none with whom we can have the least interchange of thought." Elizabeth Cady Stanton commented gratefully, "It is rare one finds three women on the shady side of sixty so bright, so liberal, so ready for new thought on all subjects."²³

Her initial return to Britain led her to send "many urgent letters" to her close friend and colleague in America, Susan B. Anthony, calling on her, too, to lend her force to the British movement. Stanton's return to Britain in 1882 had occurred at a critical time for the suffrage demand there. A campaign was under way for a further Reform Bill, primarily aimed at extending the franchise to male agricultural workers but also providing an occasion to press once again women's claim to the vote. Susan B. Anthony heard the call and joined Stanton in London in February 1883, where both addressed a major meeting of the National Society for Women's Suffrage. Priscilla Bright McLaren traveled from Scotland especially for the event, and afterward Susan B. Anthony recorded: "Everybody is delighted

²¹ E. Stanton, *Eighty Years*, 398; Priscilla Bright McLaren to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, July 17, 1883, ECSC, Douglass Library.

²² Quoted in David Rubinstein, *A Different World for Women: The Life of Millicent Garrett Fawcett* (Columbus, Ohio, 1991), 202; see also Fawcett, "England," 4.

²³ Elizabeth Cady Stanton to "Saint Margaret [Tanner], Saint Anna [Maria Priestman], Saint Mary [Priestman]," October 13 [1890], Box 23, MP.

... Even the timid ones expressed satisfaction. Mrs Stanton gave them the rankest of radical sentiments, but all so cushioned they didn't hurt."²⁴

THE CENTRAL SUFFRAGE LEADERSHIP remained cautious nonetheless, and the disunity this provoked among her British colleagues provided another trial for Elizabeth Cady Stanton during this visit. At the heart of the discord was the question of whether or not to include married women in the demand for the vote. The issue was of far greater consequence in Britain than America, for two reasons. First, in America, adult male suffrage had been achieved, at least in principle, after abolition. But the franchise in Britain remained property-based, a factor that rendered the British context of suffrage campaigning very different. Second, the doctrine of coverture remained more firmly entrenched in Britain than in the United States, where its erosion in state legislatures had begun in the 1830s.²⁵ The property basis of the franchise in Britain thus placed single women and married women each in a distinct relation to the existing franchise laws.

Jane Rendall has recently analyzed the several differing liberal conceptions of citizenship on which British suffragists drew in arguing their case. In many ways, this range of views was a strength, and Rendall's analysis indicates the inadequacy of any characterization of suffragism simply in terms of classic liberal individualism. But these different conceptions formed a bitter and longstanding source of conflict among suffragists in Britain. Those whose conception of citizenship was grounded on older radical notions of "independence" based on property holding and tax paying preferred a formulation that would secure the franchise for those unmarried and widowed women who might meet the criteria of independence. The doctrine of coverture, of course, deprived married women of such independence. Upon marriage, a woman lost not only her property in goods but, equally significant, her property in her own body. Radical-Liberal suffragists appealed to a conception of citizenship derived largely from the work of John Stuart Mill, which emphasized the right to moral autonomy and self-development of every individual as the proper basis for a political system.²⁶ As a consequence, the married woman represented for Radical-Liberal suffragists the fullest expression of the subordination of their sex. There could be no achievement of real citizenship for women that failed to redress the wrongs of the married woman. The one depended on the other.

The question of whether or not to exclude married women from the demand had divided British suffragists since the formation of the earliest suffrage

²⁴ Harper, *Susan B. Anthony*, 2: 546, 565; see also 2: 553–79, which recounts how during this visit Susan B. Anthony also formed an extensive friendship network in Britain among leading suffragists there.

²⁵ Joan Hoff, *Law, Gender, and Injustice: A Legal History of U.S. Women* (New York, 1991), 121–35, and Appendix One, which explains that although the end of coverture began much earlier in the United States, it was nonetheless a complex and uneven process that took a century to complete.

²⁶ Jane Rendall, "Citizenship, Culture and Civilization: The Languages of British Suffragists, 1866–1874," in Nolan and Daley, *Suffrage and Beyond*. In particular, Rendall shows the significance for suffragism of a new emphasis on social altruism within late nineteenth-century liberalism. Pateman, *Sexual Contract*, 51–59, 108–12, 156–82, 191–92, 202–03, explores the meaning of the loss of property in their own persons by married women.

committees in the mid-1860s, and it continued to divide them until the last years of the nineteenth century.²⁷ The dominance of the Radical-Liberals in the earliest provincial suffrage societies, and the influence of John Stuart Mill himself, had ensured the defeat of initial attempts to exclude married women from the demand in the first years of campaigning in the late 1860s. A compromise equal-rights formulation of the demand was accepted that neither specifically included nor excluded married women, although the common-law doctrine of coverture meant that married women were effectively, albeit tacitly, excluded by such wording. Couching their demand simply in terms of formal sexual equality, suffragists aimed to appease conservative opinion without offering any sanction to the doctrine of coverture. Given the nature of this compromise, Radical-Liberal suffragists also placed considerable importance on a parallel campaign for married women's property rights as a principal aspect of coverture.

This issue became even more crucial from the mid-1870s on when Lydia Becker, reluctantly and under pressure from Conservative parliamentary suffragists, whose party was in power, agreed to the explicit exclusion of married women from the demand.²⁸ Anna Maria Priestman endorsed a view of the matter general among Radical-Liberal suffragists: "Why people should be so unmerciful to such an oppressed group I cannot think."²⁹ The policy of the umbrella organization that united the various suffrage bodies, the National Society for Women's Suffrage (NSWS), went back and forth on this issue over the next few years, as the Radical-Liberal position was alternatively reasserted and attacked. For this reason, changing the legal status of married women took on an added urgency for Radical-Liberal suffragists. From 1875 on, Ursula Bright, together with Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy, stepped up the campaign for reform of the Married Women's Property Act.³⁰ They did so in clear opposition to the views of Lydia Becker, who now urged not only the exclusion of married women from the

²⁷ For more detail on the various disputes among suffragists in these early years, see Barbara Caine, "John Stuart Mill and the English Women's Movement," *Historical Studies*, 18 (1978): 52-67; and "Feminism, Suffrage and the Nineteenth Century English Women's Movement," *Women's Studies International Forum*, 5 (1982): 537-50; Andrew Rosen, "Emily Davies and the Women's Movement, 1862-67," *Journal of British Studies*, 19 (1979): 101-21; A. P. W. Robson, "The Founding of the National Society for Women's Suffrage 1866-1867," *Canadian Journal of History*, 8 (1973): 1-22.

²⁸ Lydia Becker's role in the British suffrage movement still awaits historical assessment, but see Joan Parker, "Lydia Becker: Pioneer Orator of the Women's Movement," *Manchester Region History Review*, 5 (1991): 13-20. Blackburn, *Women's Suffrage: A Record*, 23-43, provides an uncritical portrait by a close colleague, while Pankhurst, *Suffragette Movement*, 34-52, gives a more equivocal account. To begin with, Lydia Becker was an ally of the Radical-Liberal suffragists, supporting Jacob and Ursula Bright, for example, in their dispute with John Stuart Mill and his stepdaughter, Helen Taylor, over combining suffrage campaigning with agitation for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, the legislation that had introduced the compulsory medical surveillance of prostitutes. Even though he also opposed this legislation, Mill was hostile to the determination of those he called the "Bright and Becker set" to mix the two issues. See Caine, "John Stuart Mill," 60.

²⁹ A. Grenfell to Anna Maria Priestman, and sent on to Mary Priestman, May 3, 1874, Box 17, MP.

³⁰ Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy, a Manchester headmistress, played a leading role in every major women's rights campaign in this period; see Ellis Ethelmer, "A Woman Emancipator: A Biographical Sketch," *Westminster Review*, 145 (1894): 424-28; Pankhurst, *Suffragette Movement*, 31-34; Dora Montefiore, *From a Victorian to a Modern* (London, 1927), 42-43, for short portraits. DuBois, "Woman Suffrage," 27, places Elmy alongside Elizabeth Cady Stanton as one of the few figures who maintained the "radical suffragist tradition" within the women's movement. Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage and the Law*, provides an extensive and stimulating analysis of the interconnection of these various campaigns in the activities of figures such as Elmy.

franchise demand but also a suspension of such efforts to end coverture.³¹ Support for such defiance was forthcoming from many among the Bright circle, as well as among provincial Radical-Liberal suffragist opinion more generally, especially in the regions of Manchester, Liverpool, and Bristol, and among those also committed to the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts.

Some in these circles also had close links with the free-thought and republican movements of this period and the Owenite legacy on which these movements to some extent drew. Their radicalism occasionally extended to a preference for free unions over marriage—Elizabeth Wolstenholme and Ben Elmy, for example, were only persuaded to a legal marriage in the interests of the women's movement in 1874, when she was some six months pregnant. There is also evidence that Emmeline Goulden offered Richard Pankhurst a similar free union before they married a few years later. Others, such as Alice Cliff Scatcherd, showed their contempt for prevailing conceptions of marriage by refusing to wear a ring or to attend any wedding service in the established church because of the vow of obedience it extracted from women. Priscilla Bright McLaren did bring herself to attend the Anglican wedding of a niece, although she left it loudly protesting, "Well, Annie went in a free woman and has come out a slave!" and afterward poured out her feelings of indignation to the clergyman.³²

The efforts of Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy and Ursula Bright met with success at last in the passage of the Married Women's Property Act of 1882, but ironically this advance only sowed the seeds for further discord. Even though the measure extended the capacity of married women to hold property, it had been so amended in the House of Commons that it left in place the doctrine of coverture. It remained uncertain, therefore, whether married women would or would not qualify to vote under an equal rights measure, for the legal standing of married women remained ambiguously different from that of single women. This situation provoked renewed controversy over the question in the summer of 1883, and it was at this point that Elizabeth Cady Stanton made her first direct intervention in the British movement. At a major London suffrage rally, shortly after the success of Stanton's joint appearance with Susan B. Anthony, one of the leading suffragist members of Parliament denied all intention of seeking to enfranchise women under coverture. Ursula Bright and her supporters had arranged for a call to include married women to come from among the platform party and asked Elizabeth Cady Stanton to join them in this act of defiance. But such opposition was overruled from the chair. The manner in which married women were dismissed from the claim gave rise to "strong protests," for such proceedings had "carried the matter too far even for the most timid." The supporters of Ursula Bright arranged a meeting of the dissidents and called on

³¹ Lydia Becker to "Dearest" [Elizabeth Wolstenholme, whose own annotations identify her as the recipient], March 1, 1874, E. Sylvia Pankhurst Archives, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam (hereafter, ESPA). I am grateful to the institute for providing me with photocopies from this archive.

³² Reported in Mary Priestman to Helen Priestman Bright Clark, September 16, 1877, Box 14, MP. See Pateman, *Sexual Contract*, 181–82, for a fuller discussion of the significance of this vow. On the Elmys' marriage, see Holton, "Free Love"; on that of the Pankhursts, see Pankhurst, *Suffragette Movement*, 55.

Stanton to confer with them. The meeting resulted in "a great ferment," for she advised them to continue to demand the vote for all women, married and single.³³

Elizabeth Cady Stanton not only advised the dissidents but also sought to strengthen the resolve of those among her friends whom she believed were wavering on the issue. Her diary records:

I have written a letter to Mrs McLaren and Mrs Lucas, which I ask them to read to the Brights and Thomassons, on the wisdom of broadening their platform. I impress on them the fact that to get the suffrage for spinsters is all very well, but their work is to elevate the position of women at all points, and that in calling to every form of injustice and laying bare every inequality they take the shortest way to educate women into rebellion and self-assertion, and men into consideration of women's rights and wrongs. That the married women of this movement in England consent to the assumption that they are through marriage, practically represented and protected, supported and sheltered from all the adverse winds of life, is the strongest evidence of their own need for emancipation.

She wrote to prevent her friends from taking the path of political pragmatism and abandoning principles she believed fundamental to women's emancipation. Priscilla Bright McLaren responded: "I abhor the idea of degrading marriage as much as my sister Ursula Bright by any positive prohibition of a right because of marriage." But she also firmly expressed the view that "the women of our country are not prepared for some of the things you advise us to put upon our flag . . . The real practical reformer must be willing to climb step by step."³⁴

Ursula Bright, for her part, evidently took heart from Elizabeth Cady Stanton's advice, adopting an even more intransigent position on the issue. No longer was it sufficient, in her view, to resist the explicit exclusion of married women from the suffrage demand. From then on, she also argued for their *explicit inclusion*. This position appeared extreme even to many Radical-Liberal suffragists, who sought to uphold an equal rights formulation that simply ignored the differing civil status of single and married women. Ursula Bright was never, it seems, a very easy colleague to work with. The women of the Bright circle, who might express an amused tolerance for her idiosyncracies among themselves, felt that she was sometimes disruptively high-handed and provocative. Certainly, she appears to have been most effective when a big fish in a small pond, as was the case with the Married Women's Property Committee and subsequently with the Women's Franchise League. This is not to deny her achievements, especially in helping to secure significant advances in the position of married women. But it does suggest that her conception of the reformer's role was more akin to that of Elizabeth Cady Stanton than was the case, for example, with Priscilla Bright McLaren.³⁵

³³ From Susan B. Anthony's firsthand account, quoted in Harper, *Susan B. Anthony*, 2: 567-68, which also makes it clear that she herself stayed aloof from the controversy and believed her old friend's involvement in it to be misjudged: "I contend it is not in good taste for either of us to counsel public opposition to the bill before Parliament"; Ursula Bright to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, July 2 [1883], ECSC, Douglass Library.

³⁴ T. Stanton and Blatch, *E. C. Stanton*, 2: 208-09; Priscilla Bright McLaren to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, July 17, 1883, ECSC, Douglass Library. For a concise analysis of the issues involved in this controversy, see Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy's article on Woodall's Bill in the serial *Personal Rights Journal*, March 15, 1886.

³⁵ Mrs. Jacob Bright, "Letter of Mrs Jacob Bright . . ." (n.d. [circa 1883]); for the response of other Radical-Liberal suffragists, see, for example, Alice Scatcherd to Anna Maria Priestman, Novem-

Elizabeth Cady Stanton's association with Ursula Bright in this controversy appears also to have affected the reception of another proposal she and Susan B. Anthony first put before British suffragists in 1883. After the travels of each around Europe in the previous year or so, they believed the time was right for the formation of an international suffrage organization to facilitate the sharing of ideas and experience. Lydia Becker and those around her, however, remained skeptical. Helen Blackburn, Lydia Becker's close colleague as secretary of the National Society for Women's Suffrage, wrote to Anna Maria Priestman that while it was in itself "an excellent idea," caution was advisable, for it had been taken up by "some injudicious people." It is clear from other correspondence among British suffragists that Ursula Bright was considered to be among the injudicious; moreover, there were fears she planned to use this new initiative to take over the leadership of the British movement.³⁶

The Bright circle, not surprisingly, proved the most receptive to the plan, and Priscilla Bright McLaren, Margaret Bright Lucas, and Ursula Bright took up the challenge during their farewell meetings with the American suffragists in November 1883. They agreed to establish an international organization based in the United States, with corresponding committees in other countries. Out of this came an international conference of suffragists in Washington in 1888, arranged to coincide with the fortieth anniversary of the Seneca Falls convention, which had marked the formal beginnings of a women's rights movement in America. It is noteworthy that the more moderate leadership of the suffrage movement in Britain consistently failed to accord such international initiatives the same significance as their Radical-Liberal counterparts in these years. Possibly, the international context was more important to the radicals precisely because of their marginal standing in their own country; it served as a valued endorsement of their distinct identity as the radical section of their particular national movement.³⁷

ber 11, 1882, Box 22, MP; and compare with the leadership's view, as expressed in Helen Blackburn to Anna Maria Priestman, August 19, 1886, Box 19, MP, which refers to "our extremist friends" whom she hopes may be persuaded to "a wiser direction." On the increasingly bitter feelings among suffragists at this time, see Margaret Bright Lucas to Anna Maria Priestman, January 10, 1884, and Priscilla Bright McLaren to Helen Priestman Bright Clark, January 19, 1884, which refers to the "cat and dog work" between Ursula Bright and Lydia Becker, Boxes 23 and 36 respectively, MP. Priscilla Bright McLaren, as so often, attempted to play a conciliatory role within the movement, maintaining her friendships with Lydia Becker and Millicent Garrett Fawcett and remaining an important channel of communication between the Radical-Liberal suffragists and the moderate leadership; see, for example, her letter to Helen Priestman Bright Clark, March 13, 1884, Box 36, MP.

³⁶ Helen Blackburn to Anna Maria Priestman, November 15, 1883, Box 19, MP; Priscilla Bright McLaren to Helen Priestman Bright Clark, February 2, 1884, Box 36, MP, reporting a letter from Lydia Becker that presented the proposal as indicative of a growing split in the British movement and commenting, "I am not quite sure that Aunt Urie [Ursula Bright] may not be using this as an annoyance—but there is no real proof yet." It is possible that there was also some jealousy of the Americans' leadership in this initiative. Priscilla Bright McLaren in this same letter, like a number of other British suffragists, remarked privately on Lydia Becker's envy of any prominence achieved by other figures in the movement.

³⁷ Only the American chronicles tell the story of this international initiative, and the histories produced by the British movement remained parochial, although Blackburn, *Women's Suffrage: A Record*, does include a "Supplementary Chapter on Colonial Progress." Anthony and Harper, *History of Woman Suffrage*, 4: 124–42, credits the idea to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, but she herself subsequently acknowledged that her original conception of "intellectual cooperation" among suffragists around the world had not been fully realized through the International Council of Women that grew out of

BY THE TIME OF ELIZABETH CADY STANTON'S NEXT VISIT, from 1886 to early 1888, the tensions and conflicts among British suffragists had intensified even further. The failure to secure the inclusion of women in the 1884 Reform Act left the movement demoralized, and this demoralization was increased by the general political turmoil in Britain in these years. In 1886, for instance, the Liberal Party split over Prime Minister Gladstone's policy of home rule for Ireland.

Among the Bright circle, Ursula and Jacob Bright remained staunch Gladstonians committed to Irish home rule, as did the Clarks and the members of Parliament who were sons of Priscilla Bright McLaren, Charles and Walter. Priscilla Bright McLaren herself, though sympathetic to the grievances of Ireland, did not believe that home rule would provide any peaceful or long-lasting solution and so associated for a time more closely with women Liberal Unionist organizations, as did her niece, Liliash Ashworth Hallett.

These years were also ones of moral panic, a panic that in turn served to promote a "social purity" response to moral reform in the passage of repressive legislation and in oppressive policing practices. It was a panic prompted initially by the sensationalist exposé of child prostitution by W. T. Stead, a crusading journalist. This campaign had brought forth the National Vigilance Association, in which some of the moderate suffragist leadership figured prominently, while Radical suffragists resisted the repressive policies it advocated.³⁸ Such tensions were exacerbated by the involvement of the Radical Sir Charles Dilke and the Irish Nationalist leader Charles Parnell as correspondents in two notorious divorce cases in this period.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton's diary makes clear her sympathy for Irish protesters in their struggles with the authorities and also with the disgraced politicians Dilke and Parnell. Ursula Bright and her closest colleagues, including the Pankhursts and Harriot Stanton Blatch, were also supportive of Dilke and Parnell during divorce hearings. Similarly, Elizabeth Cady Stanton expressed a certain skepticism about the motives of social purity advocates such as Stead.

But if this was a period of turmoil, it was also a time when radicals began to feel more optimistic about achieving substantial social change in Britain. Stanton recorded signs during this visit that women were increasingly ready to fight "even here in slow old England." She was impressed with the younger generation coming into the movement and warned, "[O]f one thing men may be assured . . .

this initiative. The members of this body soon found the suffrage issue too contentious to pursue. Nonetheless, she maintained that it had met another of her aims in achieving suffragist "power over popular thought," E. Stanton, *Eighty Years* 412–14. It should also be noted that Theodore Stanton's editor's introduction to *The Woman Question*, v–vi, suggests that the adoption of a leadership stance toward movements in other parts of Europe was based on some shared sense of ethnic superiority among Anglo-American suffragists.

³⁸ The old Vigilance Association with which many Radical-Liberal suffragists had long been closely linked now became the Personal Rights Association, and it took a critical stand on many of the repressive policies and activities for which the National Vigilance Association was known. See Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago, 1992), 22–24, 82–83, 102–05; Lucy Bland, "'Purifying' the Public World: Feminist Vigilantes in Late Victorian England," *Women's History Review*, 1 (1992): 397–412; Deborah Gorham, "'The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon' Re-examined: Child Prostitution and the Idea of Childhood in Late-Victorian England," *Victorian Studies*, 21 (1978): 357–79, 366–68.

the next generation will not argue the question of women's rights with the infinite patience we have displayed this half century." Priscilla Bright McLaren shared these hopes: "We see everywhere women rising to a much higher moral and intellectual stature than twenty years ago."³⁹

Even so, the national leadership of the British movement continued to resist the pressure from its radical wing for a more assertive stance. And, once again, Stanton found herself at odds with this leadership over plans for the international conference, which was to meet in Washington the next year. She recorded "a very unpleasant interview" with Lydia Becker and others among the more moderate suffragists over their continuing refusal to cooperate in the venture. She turned to Priscilla Bright McLaren and Anna Maria Priestman, who helped her organize a British delegation.⁴⁰ This proved to be an oddly assorted group that included the Radical-Liberal suffragist Alice Scatcherd, the social purity campaigner Mrs. Ormiston Chant, and Mrs. Ashton (May) Dilke.

The inclusion of May Dilke was the cause of yet further controversy, for she had become implicated in some of the scandal surrounding her brother-in-law, Charles Dilke, when he had been cited as corespondent in her sister's divorce case. The unorthodox sexual history of several members of May Dilke's family, as well as suggestions about her own irregular life since being widowed, became the subject of speculation and gossip. Helen Taylor, Mill's stepdaughter and another leading figure in Radical politics, used the presence of May Dilke as grounds to withdraw from participation in the international conference, in connection with which she had been scheduled to address a Senate Committee on Women's Suffrage. Both Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Priscilla Bright McLaren pressed Helen Taylor to adopt a more generous view of the matter, with no success. Stanton showed her solidarity by traveling back to the United States for the conference in the company of May Dilke.⁴¹

In the year that followed, the tensions within the British movement could no longer be held in check by the national leadership. At the end of 1888, a section that included a number of the Bright circle successfully moved to alter the rules of the National Society for Women's Suffrage. This alteration allowed for the affiliation of other women's organizations that included women's suffrage among their objects. In the view of those who opposed this change, it opened the way for the suffrage movement to be taken over by the women's auxiliaries of the Liberal Party.⁴² Certainly, some of the main proponents of change were leading Liberal

³⁹ T. Stanton and Blatch, *E. C. Stanton*, 2: 235, 270; Priscilla Bright McLaren to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, November 17, 1887, ECSC, Douglass Library; E. Stanton, *Eighty Years*, 399, 422-23.

⁴⁰ E. Stanton, *Eighty Years*, 408; Elizabeth Cady Stanton to the Priestman sisters, February 21 and 26, 1888, Box 23, MP.

⁴¹ See Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Helen Taylor, March 6 [1888], and Priscilla Bright McLaren to Helen Taylor, January 21, 1888, vols. 12 and 13 respectively, the Mill-Taylor Papers, Archives of the British Library of Political and Economic Sciences, the London School of Economics, to which my thanks for allowing me to read in these papers; Helen Taylor to Susan B. Anthony, March 7, 1888, HM10610, Harper Collection, Huntington Library, Los Angeles, with thanks to the Huntington Library for permission to draw on this and other correspondence in its Western Historical Manuscripts collection; E. Stanton, *Eighty Years*, 410, which provides also a sympathetic portrait of May Dilke.

⁴² The previous few years had seen a rapid formation of Women's Liberal Associations, first founded in Bristol in 1881 by Anna Maria Priestman at least in part out of her frustration with the

suffragists, including Priscilla Bright McLaren's son Walter and his wife, Eva McLaren, while many of the leading opponents were Liberal Unionists, such as Millicent Garrett Fawcett and Liliash Ashworth Hallett. These last two joined with Lydia Becker in establishing an alternative society that maintained the old rules of the NSW. ⁴³

Lydia Becker's account of this split suggests that the exclusion of married women from the suffrage demand had also been an issue dividing the two groups, and she designated her opponents the "left-wing" and "extreme section" of the movement. It shortly became evident, however, that the leadership of the "new rules" society was itself divided over the issue. Its solution was to support bills that explicitly excluded married women as well as those formulated in terms of equal rights. But it refused to support measures that explicitly included married women. When a group of Radical-Liberal suffragists, including Richard Pankhurst, failed to commit the "new rules" society to oppose any suffrage measure that explicitly excluded married women, these dissidents decided at last on the formation of their own suffrage organization. ⁴⁴ Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy, as often in the past, took the lead in this new initiative, with the help of Alice Scatcherd and Harriet McClquham. ⁴⁵

Harriot Stanton Blatch linked the formation of the Women's Franchise League to her mother's intervention in the British movement some six years before when she had argued for the inclusion of married women in the suffrage demand.

national suffrage leadership. This rapid growth, however, reflected the growing importance of women as election workers, following the passage of the Corrupt Practices Act of 1883. In 1887, the associations were brought together in the Women's Liberal Federation (WLF), for control of which suffragists waged a long struggle. See Sandra Stanley Holton, "The Strange Death of Liberal Feminism: Anna Maria Priestman and the Origins of the Women's Liberal Federation," paper delivered to the "Wollstonecraft 200" conference, University of Sussex, December 1992. For further discussion of the WLF, see Leslie Walker, "Party Political Women: A Comparative Study of the Liberal Women and the Primrose League, 1890-1914," in *Equal or Different: Women's Politics 1800-1914*, Jane Rendall, ed. (Oxford, 1987), 165-91; Claire Hirshfield, "Fractured Faith: Liberal Party Women and the Suffrage Issue in Britain, 1892-1914," *Gender and History*, 2 (1990): 173-97.

⁴³ The "new rules" society called itself the Central National Society for Women's Suffrage (CNSWS), while the new "old rules" organization somewhat confusingly called itself the Central Committee of the National Society for Women's Suffrage (CCNSWS). Each was sometimes also more conveniently referred to by the address of its central offices, as, respectively, the "Parliament Street" society and the "Great College Street" society.

⁴⁴ Lydia Becker's editorial in *Women's Suffrage Journal*, 20 (1889): 48, describes the split and argues that the married women's claim for the vote was an "uncalled for and gratuitous obstruction" to the main demand. *Personal Rights Journal*, April 1889, records the dissidents' intervention at the first annual meeting of the CNSWS, an episode again generally ignored in the standard histories of the suffrage movement for this period.

⁴⁵ Women's Franchise League, "Report of Proceedings at the Inaugural Meeting, London July 25th 1889" (London [1889]), 3, 6, in the Fawcett Library, London Guildhall University, gives Richard Pankhurst's generous recognition of these others' role in its formation. Sylvia Pankhurst's account in *Suffragette Movement*, 95, serves to emphasize the role of her parents at the expense of those who actually undertook this task, while Harriot Stanton Blatch in *Challenging Years*, 73, emphasizes the role of Ursula Bright, recalling that "Mrs Pankhurst and I, burdened as we were by young children and domestic cares, were the admiring neophytes of the circle." Ursula and Jacob Bright, in fact, initially kept aloof from the new society for reasons that remain unclear; see Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy to Harriet McClquham, May 9, 1889, June 5, 1890; September 19, 1904, September 27, 1904, Additional Manuscripts 47449 and 47454, the Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy Papers, British Library (hereafter, EWEP), with my thanks to the British Library for permission to quote from this correspondence.

Undoubtedly, the formation of this new suffrage organization had arisen out of continuing disputes over this question among British suffragists. It is clear, too, that the league drew on the friendship network formed by her mother's friends and colleagues for its early support. Harriot Stanton Blatch herself took a leading role in the new society, while her mother and Isabella Beecher Hooker both became corresponding members during the year after its formation.⁴⁶

Although the league's leadership drew on a second generation of suffragists, it still presented itself as a continuation of the Garrisonian approach to reform. William Lloyd Garrison, Jr., was among the main speakers at its inaugural meeting. He struck a note that harked back directly to his father's role in the abolition movement, in an insistence that reformers had a very different role from politicians: they must hold to the principle that underlay their cause and not allow themselves to be diverted by any considerations of "policy." He also presented the purpose of the new league as one that held to "moral force" in order "to declare the whole gospel of suffrage without let or hindrance." A similar attitude if more anecdotal tone is evident in Harriot Stanton Blatch's contribution to these proceedings: "The first thing I want to do is to make a little personal declaration, that is, that for the first time in a suffrage meeting in England I feel at home." She recalled her mother's experiences of addressing meetings in Britain, which were always preceded by such warnings as, "Now, Mrs Stanton, please do not speak on the Bible question, and please do not touch on the matter of divorce, and, above all things, do not touch on the question of Married Women's Suffrage.' Well, my mother said that at last she felt, with her crown of white hair, like the Jungfrau, rising cold and frigid into the sky, never allowed to melt and show her real heart." A different approach was evidently intended by this breakaway organization.⁴⁷

The history of the league over the next few years suggests that the Garrisonian legacy to the British suffrage movement found its fullest expression here. Political pragmatism was consistently eschewed in favor of principle, especially in the

⁴⁶ T. Stanton and Blatch, *E. C. Stanton*, 2: 288 n. 4. Elizabeth Cady Stanton's endorsement of the league and involvement in its business in 1890 is evident also in the "Programme for the Women's Franchise League International Conference, 16-17 July 1890," proof copy in Harriet McIlquham Papers, Fawcett Library, London Guildhall University. My thanks for permission to draw on its collections and more particularly to David Doughan for providing photocopies of some of the printed material cited above and below. The conference was apparently conceived as a successor to a similar event in Paris the previous year and to the original Washington meeting in 1888. Little information on these events appears to have survived, but see *Personal Rights Journal*, July 1890. Elizabeth Cady Stanton was also during this period exchanging ideas on methods of activism with Alice Scatcherd, with whom Harriot Stanton Blatch was working closely in the Women's Liberal Federation as well as in the Women's Franchise League; see Alice Scatcherd to Elizabeth Cady Stanton (fragment), enclosed in Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Alice Clark, October 20, 1890, Box 75, MP. Similarly, Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy spent the summer of 1890 in Basingstoke with the two American suffragists as she tried, unsuccessfully, to retain her role in the league's leadership; Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy to Harriet McIlquham, October 27, 1890, Additional Manuscripts 47449, EWEP.

⁴⁷ Women's Franchise League, "Inaugural Proceedings," 25-26. Among the league's early leaders were also Clementia and P. A. Taylor, whose radicalism went back to the 1840s Anti-Corn Law League and abolition, and whose home, Aubrey House, where the first women's suffrage petition had been pasted up in 1866, had also provided the gathering place for Radical-Liberal circles in London in that period. Also included were Josephine Butler, who had led the campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts from 1870 until repeal in 1886, and Emmeline Pankhurst and Florence Fenwick Miller, from among a second generation of radical suffragists.

matter of including married women in the suffrage demand. Attention was constantly drawn to the complex of institutions that limited British freedoms, including that longstanding radical bugbear, aristocratic privilege. Hence abolition of the House of Lords also became part of the league's platform. In the work of the league, we also find a commitment to expanding the campaign for suffrage beyond the ranks of middle-class reform and to engaging popular radical support. Elizabeth Cady Stanton continued to encourage such challenges to the approach of the moderate leadership of the British movement. She insisted, for example, on the value of anything that gained the public's attention, whether that attention be good or bad, and emphasized the importance of press coverage for the suffrage demand.⁴⁸

The platform of the Women's Franchise League was an expansive one from the beginning and radical by the standards of the existing suffrage societies. The exclusion of married women from the suffrage demand was, as we have seen, the main spur to its formation, and Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy drafted a more extensive suffrage measure for the league to promote. The Women's Disabilities Removal Bill, brought before the House of Commons in 1889 and 1890, included a clause that "no woman shall be subject to legal incapacity in voting . . . by reason of coverture." But the league also sought to address the inequality of women before the law more generally, for its members shared the view of Alice Scatcherd when she told the inaugural meeting, "I, for one, am perfectly tired of joining societies which fight only for a little bit, a little shred, a little fragment of freedom."⁴⁹

BY THE TIME OF ELIZABETH CADY STANTON'S last visit to Britain in 1890, she was firmly aligned with the most intransigent of the Radical-Liberal suffragists around the Women's Franchise League. Lydia Becker had recently died, and Ursula Bright had moved into the league's leadership. In Elizabeth Cady Stanton's assessment, Bright now unquestionably stood "at the helm of the woman suffrage movement on this side of the ocean." But the league itself was experiencing some internal division at least in part as a consequence of Ursula Bright's presence, a division that soon led to the expulsion of Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy. Elmy feared that the Brights had been brought into the league by the Pankhursts to ease the way for the disgraced Radical Charles Dilke to gain control of it as part of a plan to rebuild his career on a combination of women's and labor issues. Elmy wished, instead, to keep the new organization clear of any divided loyalties that might result from such affiliations.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ For example, she encouraged the efforts of Alice Clark in this respect; Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Alice Clark, October 20 [1890], Box 75, MP.

⁴⁹ Women's Franchise League, "Report of Meeting in Support of 'The Women's Disabilities Bill'" (London [1889]), M50/2/32/3, Manchester Public Library Archive. I thank the City of Manchester Arts and Leisure Council for permission to draw on this material; Women's Franchise League, "Inaugural Proceedings," 22, Fawcett Library, London Guildhall University. For a further account of the league's platform, see Florence Fenwick Miller, "On the Programme of the Women's Franchise League" (London, 1890), also Fawcett Library, London Guildhall University.

⁵⁰ T. Stanton and Blatch, *E. C. Stanton*, 2: 262; Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy to Harriet McIlquham, May 26, 1890, June 5, 1890, October 27, 1906, Additional Manuscripts 47449 and 47455, EWEP. Her letters at this time also indicate tensions with Alice Scatcherd and Florence

After the first annual meeting, however, Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy was replaced as secretary and resigned from the league.⁵¹ The following year, Harriot Stanton Blatch became the league's joint honorary secretary with Ursula Bright. The records that remain of the league's activities under its new leadership suggest that it continued to conceive of itself principally as the voice of radical suffragism, committed to a more advanced platform than the more moderate societies, deliberately linking itself to the international women's movement, especially to the movement in the United States, and pursuing new sources of support for the suffrage demand in the emerging labor and socialist movements. This last it did mainly by providing speakers on women's suffrage for radical clubs, progressive clubs, and branches of the Women's Cooperative Guild.⁵² But from this time on, it also exhibited the Liberal Party loyalties of its leadership, and the Women's Liberal Federation now became a focus for many of its activities.⁵³

There are no membership records extant, and the few details provided of league finances in the only surviving minute book suggest that Alice Scatcherd and, to a lesser extent, Ursula Bright were its financial mainstays.⁵⁴ A generous reading of its records would be that it attracted a membership of a few hundred. The central executive committee does not appear to have kept in very close touch with local branches established in London and the region of Leeds. Indeed, the work of the league in the Leeds area seems to have run virtually autonomously under the direction of Alice Scatcherd, while individual members of the executive committee on several occasions undertook activities in the name of the league for

Fenwick Miller over her position as paid secretary. Pankhurst, *Suffragette Movement*, 96, presents a different interpretation, which is misleading both in terms of the timing of these events and in wrongly suggesting a change of position on the inclusion of married women in the suffrage demand by Elmy.

⁵¹ Minutes, July 25, 1890, Women's Franchise League, in the Special Collections Department, Northwestern University Library, Evanston, Illinois (hereafter, WFL Minutes). I am grateful to R. Russell Maylone, Curator, for providing me with a microfilm copy of this minute book, and for permission to draw on this source here. Elmy's departure from the league was followed shortly afterward by the resignation of McIlquham, and the two together subsequently formed the Women's Emancipation Union, which continued to support the women's suffrage bill Elmy herself had drafted for the league but which, in a noteworthy addition, also campaigned for the legal recognition of rape in marriage. See "Women's Emancipation Union: An Association of Workers to Secure the Political, Sexual, and Economic Independence of Women" (Congleton, November 1891). Anna Maria Priestman was among those who gave her support to this new organization. For accounts of the WEU, see Rubinstein, *Before the Suffragettes*, 144–45; Lucy Bland, "The Married Woman, the 'New Woman' and the Feminist: Sexual Politics of the 1890s," in Rendall, *Equal or Different*, 141–64.

⁵² WFL Minutes, April 23 and May 29, 1891; also November 24, 1890, January 2, 1891, February 2, 1891, March 18, 1891, December 4, 1891, April 25, 1893, May 18, 1893, March 16, 1894, June 9, 1894, for examples of its international links and orientation toward radical and working-class organizations. Other sources for the activities of the league include a few pamphlets, which survive in the archives of the Manchester Public Library and in the Fawcett Library, London Guildhall University; also, some letters of Ursula Bright to Emmeline Pankhurst, in ESPA, and occasional irregular reports and correspondence in the *Personal Rights Journal*, the *Women's Gazette and Weekly News*, the *Women's Herald*, the *Women's Penny Paper*, and the *Women's Signal*. The last provides the only documentary source I have been able to identify for the league's final years.

⁵³ For example, WFL Minutes, September 15, 1890, February 2, 1891, February 3, 1892, May 18, 1892, June 9, 1894.

⁵⁴ WFL Minutes, February 2, 1891, March 18, 1891 (which suggests that its income for the previous year was a little over £350), May 4, 1891, November 11, 1891, [April 12] 1894; and see also Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy to Harriet McIlquham, October 27, 1889, Additional Manuscripts 47449, EWEP.

which they only subsequently sought its endorsement.⁵⁵ But such indicators cannot provide a proper measure of the success or significance of the league.

An uncompromising and confrontational activism was what gave the league both its identity and its rationale. It saw itself as the conscience of Radical-Liberal suffragism, constantly keeping its perspective before audiences within both the women's movement and popular radical circles, though without seeking to become a mass movement in itself. This was the character of the league as presented, for example, by Ursula Bright when describing its work to an international audience at the World Congress of Representative Women organized during the Chicago World Fair of 1893. She emphasized the Women's Franchise League's special commitment "in plain language to ask for votes for married women" with the declaration that "the legal position of the wife in England is a scandal to civilization." Ursula Bright also laid claim to "a much broader and bolder" approach than "the ordinary suffrage societies." The platform she outlined was indeed an extensive one: equal political rights and duties; equal educational opportunities; equal wages for equal work; equal access to paid, honorary, or elected public office; equality under family law; equality in the rights and liabilities of contract.⁵⁶

Undoubtedly, though, the league's work also evidenced an unwavering loyalty to Gladstone and to a Liberal Party that had repeatedly thwarted the suffrage demand. In this same address, Ursula Bright offered a somewhat lame explanation for this situation, pointing to the league's altruistic dedication to the cause of Irish home rule and seeking to direct her audience's attention to the "timid counsels" that would exclude married women from the claim, counsels she blamed on the "narrow prejudices of Tories or second-hand Liberals." Bright was attempting to address indirectly those critics of the league who would dismiss it simply as a women's auxiliary of the Gladstonian Liberals. While she demonstrated effectively that her suffrage organization was committed to a broader conception of women's citizenship, she failed convincingly to answer the charges of the league's subordination to Liberal Party faction fighting. Perhaps the better to establish the radical credentials of the league, she also noted in her conclusion: "The leaders of the working men are almost to a man on our side."⁵⁷

This link with the labor movement was central to the approach to suffrage campaigning for a number of the league's leaders. By this time, the league was also looking for support, for example, from the campaign for the eight-hour day, and much of its work was directed toward organizing working-class support for the suffrage demand. At its inaugural meeting, Alice Scatcherd had argued: "There are only two great questions presently before the public. These are the labour question and the women's question. And when we come to consider these questions really they are united; for it is largely on the economic condition of

⁵⁵ WFL Minutes, September 15, 1890, February 2, 1891, March 18, 1891, April 23, 1893. In keeping with a Garrisonian tendency to a loose and unhierarchical organization, the role of chair of the executive meetings rotated among its members, whose attendance could also be very irregular.

⁵⁶ Mrs. Jacob Bright, "The Origins and Objects of the Women's Franchise League of Great Britain and Ireland," *The World Congress of Representative Women*, May Wright Sewall, ed. (Chicago, 1894), 415-20, esp. 416, 418.

⁵⁷ Bright, "Origins," 416, 417, 420.

woman that her freedom in the future will depend." She was giving expression to a new perspective on women's rights that proved especially influential in the work of the league, one based on a fresh conception of women's citizenship.⁵⁸

This new perspective began to emerge in radical suffragist argument in the early 1880s, and it based claims to citizenship on the labor of women, operating also on a broad understanding of labor that included every kind of women's work, in reproduction and sexual labor as well as the workplace, in unpaid as well as paid labor.⁵⁹ Harriot Stanton Blatch described this perspective as an "economic" approach to the issue, an approach that was to give special attention to the need of working women for the vote. It appealed especially strongly to Radical-Liberal suffragists and clearly informed much of the work of the Women's Franchise League.⁶⁰ This new "economic" perspective within the women's movement sometimes also linked women's rights to a critique of social relations under capitalism and emphasized the need to unite industrial women workers with middle-class women in the campaign for the vote. Here, Fabians such as Harriot Stanton Blatch were an important influence. Explaining her women's rights commitment to Beatrice and Sidney Webb, for example, Blatch argued: "Women are the source of the race. Its supreme moulders. To do that work efficiently, they must be politically and economically independent beyond all call. Free they cannot be under capitalism: the capitalistic system and feminism are at war."⁶¹

Perhaps the most notorious episode in the league's history occurred in 1892, when some of its members intervened at a public meeting in support of a new suffrage bill coming before Parliament. The league maintained, incorrectly, that this measure effectively served to exclude married women. Not content with attacking the provisions of the bill, some league members, led by the socialist Herbert Burrows, stormed the stage. The incident caused considerable unease among some members of the league, even though Burrows and his supporters claimed that it was they, in fact, who had been the initial victims of violence at the hands of Ben Elmy, husband of Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy. Some resignations

⁵⁸ Women's Franchise League, "Inaugural Proceedings," 22.

⁵⁹ For example, May Dilke's response to the Anti-Suffragists "Appeal," *Nineteenth Century*, 26 (1889): 97-103, mobilizes just such a conception of citizenship to counter the militaristic account of citizenship often used as an argument against votes for women. She asserted, for example, that women in childbirth put their lives at risk equally with men called on to do battle, insisting that the maintenance of society rested not on warfare but on labor in all its forms. Although much of women's labor went unpaid, it was "quite as fundamental a part of civilized life as the paid labour of men." Moreover, she argued, women were also increasingly entering the paid work force and therefore needed their own voice in the making of laws that controlled the paid labor market.

⁶⁰ This perspective is evident also in Richard Haldane, "Some Economic Aspects of Women's Suffrage," *Contemporary Review*, 58 (1890): 830-38. Haldane was at this time a rising young Liberal politician and in 1889 and 1890 introduced into Parliament the Women's Franchise League's Women's Disabilities Removal Bill.

⁶¹ Recalled in Blatch and Lutz, *Challenging Years*, 79. See also Anthony and Harper, *History of Woman Suffrage*, 4: 310-11, which gives the text of part of her paper "Woman and the Economic Factor" presented to the National-American Convention in Washington in 1898. Compare also Diane Kirkby's discussion of "industrial feminism" in the United States in the early twentieth century, *Alice Henry: The Power of Pen and Voice; The Life of an Australian-American Labour Reformer* (Cambridge, 1991), which also examines the international exchange of ideas among suffragists, most especially through the WTUL.

followed, and Burrows was asked to provide the league's executive with his own account in writing, something that was apparently never forthcoming.⁶²

The bill in question, though less than an equal rights measure, deliberately avoided any explicit reference to coverture or to married women. It would have given the parliamentary vote to all female local government electors; some married women were already voting under such franchises. It was, then, a further compromise with conservative opinion. But it was one that many Radical-Liberal suffragists such as Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy were ready to accept precisely because it reinforced the breach in coverture already established with regard to the local government franchise. The league's rejection of it provides further evidence of its ultra-radical stance on this issue. Harriot Stanton Blatch, for one, believed that the league's opposition to such a compromise was unreasonable and resigned from its executive committee in consequence.⁶³

The league's most important legacy for the twentieth-century movement, somewhat ironically, was the part it played in securing a critical amendment to the Local Government Act of 1894. This law admitted married women with the appropriate qualifications to local government franchises on the same basis as single women. At long last, the question of coverture in relation to the suffrage demand was effectively dead.⁶⁴ Married women's equal eligibility with single women for the vote had finally been clearly established. Although the old guard of the suffrage leadership continued to dispute the question for a little while longer, the way was clear for an unequivocal demand for equal rights for all women in the parliamentary franchise and for a reunification of the suffrage movement within the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, which followed in 1897. The Women's Franchise League had helped achieve, therefore, a situation in which its own existence was no longer necessary—perhaps the most significant achievement for which any such radical reform organization might hope.⁶⁵

⁶² WFL Minutes, May 2, 1892, August 5, 1892, September 28, 1892, October 19, 1892. Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy's account of the affair differs significantly from that of the league demonstrators and is to be found in her letter to Harriet McIlquham, May 18, 1892, Additional Manuscripts 47449, EWEF.

⁶³ WFL Minutes, May 23, 1892; and compare with the discussion of a subsequent compromise in Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy, "Women's Suffrage," *Shafts*, April 1897.

⁶⁴ See Pankhurst, *Suffragette Movement*, 116–18, for a fuller discussion of this event and its meaning. Walter McLaren, son of Priscilla Bright McLaren, was the member of Parliament who secured government agreement to this amendment after tense and complex negotiations, while Ursula Bright and her supporters exerted pressure to ensure that the government did not back down on its agreement. See Walter McLaren to Millicent Garrett Fawcett, November 26, 1893, December 2, 1893, January 8, 1894, January 11, 1894, January 13, 1894, Manchester Public Library Archives, M50/2/1/206–210; Ursula Bright to Emmeline Pankhurst, November 25, 27, and 28, 1893, ESPA.

⁶⁵ Pankhurst, *Suffragette Movement*, 120, suggests that after the success of the Local Government Act in 1894, Ursula Bright drifted away from politics to theosophy, while the Pankhursts were increasingly drawn into socialist politics and away from their former Liberal circles. Reports in the *Women's Signal*, May 27, June 3, January 7, 1897, however, provide evidence that Alice Scatcherd kept the league alive at this time and that it participated in the consultations that preceded the eventual reunification of the movement within the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies. It continued, too, to find occasion for the expression of the Radical-Liberal perspective, organizing its own Jubilee address to Queen Victoria of "representative women," among whom members of the Bright circle were much in evidence. This called for "one royal word of sympathy" for—"one expression of gracious confidence" regarding—equal civil rights for women, while Millicent Garrett

LOOKING BACK, HARRIOT STANTON BLATCH saw the origins of militancy in both Britain and the United States in the work of the Women's Franchise League during the 1890s.⁶⁶ Such a claim appears startling in terms of standard accounts of the British suffrage movement in the nineteenth century, accounts that generally emphasize its moderation, even conservatism. It is startling also in terms of current understandings of suffrage militancy, which is still discussed in terms of the extreme violence of militant demonstrations in the 1912–1914 period.⁶⁷ Space does not permit a detailed discussion of this claim. It is worth noting, however, that already in the 1890s some Radical-Liberal suffragists were promoting new tactics, most notably tax resistance, that later became a feature of early militancy.⁶⁸ The origins and nature of militancy remain in need of more detailed analysis. Yet it seems likely, in view of the evidence presented above, that some significant continuities did exist between nineteenth-century radical suffragism and twentieth-century militancy, and that our present conceptualization of militancy is inadequate inasmuch as it neglects such continuities.⁶⁹

Elizabeth Cady Stanton herself foresaw that radical suffragism might well take a different course, as those educated in the Garrisonian and Quaker traditions of reform were increasingly replaced by new generations on whom they were an ever-weakening influence. In 1889, she warned that her generation had been “bred in the pacific school of the old Abolitionists, dominated by the non-resistance ideas of Garrison, and where the presence of so many Quakers spread

Fawcett organized an altogether more respectful address from the CNSWS. *Women's Signal*, April 15 and July 1, 1897.

⁶⁶ Blatch and Lutz, *Challenging Years*, 73. Another account of this period, Montefiore, *From a Victorian*, 41, similarly recalled “continuous signs that a breaking away of more urgent spirits was imminent,” singling out the Union of Practical Suffragists for special mention. This body had been formed by Anna Maria Priestman in 1896 to work within the Women's Liberal Federation and encourage a stronger commitment to women's suffrage. Its executive committee included Ursula Bright and Harriot Stanton Blatch, as well as Mary Priestman and Eva McLaren from among the Bright circle; see Union of Practical Suffragists, “Leaflet No XII” (n.d. [circa 1898]); and *Women's Signal*, May 27, 1897, for a report of its first annual meeting.

⁶⁷ The classic example of this approach remains George Dangerfield's extremely influential account in *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (London, 1935); see also Andrew Rosen, *Rise Up Women! The Militant Campaign of the Women's Social and Political Union, 1903–1914* (London, 1974). More recent alternative approaches to suffrage militancy are to be found in Brian Harrison, “The Act of Militancy,” in his *Peaceable Kingdom: Stability and Change in Modern Britain* (Oxford, 1982); Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850–1920* (Chicago, 1985), esp. chap. 7; Liz Stanley with Ann Morley, *The Life and Death of Emily Wilding Davison* (London, 1989); Sandra Stanley Holton, “‘In Sorrowful Wrath’: Suffrage Militancy and the Romantic Feminism of Emmeline Pankhurst,” in *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century*, Harold L. Smith, ed. (Aldershot, 1990), 7–24.

⁶⁸ See, for example, Dora Montefiore's letter on tax resistance in *Women's Signal*, June 17, 1897, together with the editor's response, August 5, 1897. Her account in *From a Victorian*, 72–83, makes such tactics central to early conceptions of militancy and suggests that the subsequent rejection of the tactics of civil disobedience was one of the sources of the first splits among the early leadership of the Women's Social and Political Union.

⁶⁹ Mutual endorsement and exchange of views evidently remained important to these transatlantic friends in Elizabeth Cady Stanton's declining years. When Helen Priestman Bright Clark visited her in New York in 1900, she was again characteristically advised not to be “too afraid of overstepping the conventionalities.” T. Stanton and Blatch, *E. C. Stanton*, 2: 351. The Bright circle also arranged for an address from thirty of its members on the occasion of their American friend's eightieth birthday; see *New York Tribune*, November 12, 1895; and see also the Women's Franchise League's address to the NAWSA convention 1891, reported in *Woman's Journal*, March 14, 1891.

about an atmosphere of brotherly love. But we are passing away, and the new American woman is coming to the front. *Cave Canis*." The year before, at the first international gathering of suffragists in Washington in 1888, she had issued an even more explicit warning: "It requires no prophet to foretell the revolution ahead when women strike hands with Nihilists, Socialists, Communists, and Anarchists, in defence of the most enlarged liberties of the people."⁷⁰ In this way, Elizabeth Cady Stanton had "prophesied and in anticipation, welcomed the militant suffrage movement."⁷¹ She did not live to see twentieth-century militancy begin to hit its stride in both Britain and the United States. But when an Australian suffragist, Muriel Matters, chained herself to the grille in the Ladies Gallery of the House of Commons, and that grille at last came down, it is surely not too fanciful to hear the ghost of her American predecessor chuckling overhead.

⁷⁰ Quoted in Gail Parker, "Introduction," to E. Stanton, *Eighty Years* (1898; rpt. edn., New York, 1971), xix; and DuBois, "Woman Suffrage," 28.

⁷¹ T. Stanton and Blatch, *E. C. Stanton*, 1: xviii.