

★ She Keeps Her Feet on the Ground ★



THE HON. MABEL HOWARD
Feminism is not enough

I commented on the novel procedure in giving Miss Howard the job of supervising the welfare of women and children in departments other than her own.

"Yes," she said, "I think this is a remarkable forward step to put a woman in charge of all affairs affecting women."

"Certainly. But as a point of fact, hasn't your work been mainly among men?"

"No, I would not say that at all. I have always had all sorts of welfare work and benefit work to supervise, and I always have women's interests in mind."

"Have you found in your career, and particularly in Parliament, that it has been a disadvantage to be a woman?"

"Not at all. I have never been treated other than as an equal and a comrade."

"You don't complain, like Dr. Edith Summerskill, that men can put their feet on their desks and women can't?"

"If I wanted to put my feet up in the House I would; but I don't. I don't like lolling."

More than Feminism

"Do you think that women have a special contribution to make in Parliament?"

"I believe we should have women in Parliament. They can get there if they train, but not just because they are women. In Parliament a woman must be more than just an ordinary feminist. She must be educated to do the job. Without special training a woman might have a very hard time. But there is need for trained women in Parliament. I get constant appeals for help from women. Many come to me just because I am a woman, and quite regardless of party, and they seem to go away brightened up."

Miss Howard looks a woman of purpose. "Has a political career always been your ambition?"

"Not exactly an ambition. I grew up in politics. I always worked with and helped my father, and I never looked on politics as ambition, but just as a means of service to the community. My father's was a life of service."

"And you continue his work?"

"I always hoped to follow on. All I am and all I ever will be is just due to my father."

I could not help noticing that Miss Howard did not hope to be this and that. She does not picture herself in ambitious positions. She knows what she wants to do and what she can do. It is the result and not the effect that counts.

"And you began where your father left off?"

"I began at the age of 13½ when I stood on a box in the Cathedral Square, Christchurch, and recited a poem by Russell Lowell."

I remembered then that Miss Howard liked to have her feet on the ground — or on the firm deck of the ferry steamer. When I saw her in 1943 she had just flown up from Christchurch—and didn't like it.

"Now I suppose you always fly?"

"Fly? Not if I can help it. I dislike it as much as ever. I shall never get used to it. I'd rather tackle a big job like this than face up to a flight."

"What about your health and this 120-hour week?" I asked, though the new Minister of Health did not look as though she had given the medical profession any worries to date.

"Never had a doctor in my life," came the quick reply. "Just hard work. I've never had time to be ill."

Time was up and as I shook hands I asked whether Miss Howard had any special message for *The Listener*.

"Tell them to make their crosswords easier. I've never had time to finish one yet, and now I haven't a hope."

—S.S.

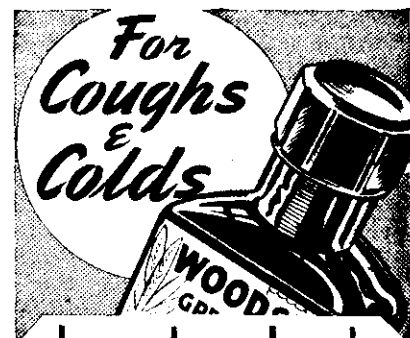


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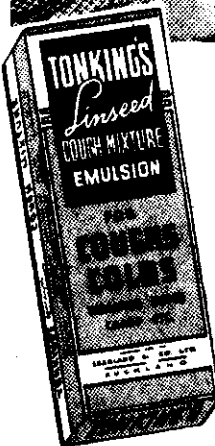
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