

# Salute To SELINA

## Who Had A Sense Of Civic Responsibility

**S**ELINA first showed her sense of Civic Responsibility by enrolling as a Militant Suffragette at the age of 12, but 10 years later, when the object of the movement was almost achieved, she realised that kidnapping Members of Parliament could no longer be considered a career in itself, and married one of them instead.

Selina's mother was very pleased that Selina had at last "settled down," but this was far from being the case, for Selina's sense of civic responsibility led her to rush up and down the country addressing mass meetings and election rallies, so that she never had time to settle anywhere for long—until after the next General Election, when Selina's husband, in spite of Selina's campaigning, was defeated by a large majority, and was told by his party leader that as far as politics were concerned, he was a Gone Coon. It was with great difficulty that Selina dissuaded her husband from joining the British Legion in order to forget, but finally she managed to convince him that a nobler career awaited him in New Zealand, and held out the hope that in the fullness of time he might even become a gentleman farmer. Accordingly they bought up a stretch of rolling grassland somewhere

about the middle of the Canterbury Plains, and, his early efforts in goat-raising and tea-planting having proved abortive, Selina's husband agreed to bow to convention (a thing he had never bowed to in the whole of his political career), and go in for wheat and sheep instead. And in this he was completely successful.

**MEANWHILE**, it was not to be supposed that Selina's Sense of Civic Responsibility was lying dormant. On the contrary she vindicated it by producing nine children in 10 years, and by interesting herself in all communal activities from the Women's Institute to the Parish Sewing Circle. And in spite of the amount of time, she was required to spend dashing from one committee meeting to the next, her children were very well looked after, family meals were always on time, and no speck of dust was ever visible on the shining surface of her polished floors.

It was not till Selina's youngest child was 10 years old that Selina began to think seriously of a political career for herself, and not only for herself but for all women, thinking it disgraceful that there should be only three women members of Parliament to represent the interests of almost half the population of the country. She laid her plans carefully, determining to begin by getting herself well-known on the various committees of charitable organisations, and gradually working up through the public bodies till finally she reached her goal. Accordingly, she shifted with her five eldest children to a house in Wellington, and in her first year, was successful in getting herself elected to the executive of no fewer than 47 societies, most of which were concerned with preventing something.

Her next year's programme was slightly more constructive, involving as it did the contesting of vacancies on an Electric Power Board, the Harbour Board, the Diocesan Synod and the Bookmakers' Convention. And it was only in the first two cases that her candidature was successful, for the prejudice and lack of foresight of the latter two bodies prevented her nomination from as much as appearing on the voting cards. And it was in regard to her election to the Electric Power Board that Selina felt her greatest triumph. For here she was a pioneer—the first woman in her territory ever to be elected to that august body.

**SELINA** never forgot her first meeting.

The members of the board rose as one man at her entrance, and the chairman presented her with a sheaf of arum lilies. He spoke at length of the value of having a woman on the Electric Power Board, of the importance of having the Woman's Point of View on a subject so vital to women as Electric Power. Finally, he spoke of the Woman's Touch, and the sweetness and light which would be introduced into meetings by the mere fact of her presence, and concluded by mentioning the fact

that the chair covers were rather worn, and he supposed she'd want to do something about new curtains for the boardroom. Selina made a brief speech of reply, and the business of the meeting began.

The members immediately reached for pipes and cigarette cases. The chairman, catching Selina's raised eyebrow, asked her permission. "No!" said Selina, firmly.

There was a horrified silence. For a moment it looked as if mutiny was inevitable. Then one by one the members sullenly re-pocketed their pipes.

It could not be said that the first meeting was exactly a social success. And at the next meeting neither the chairman nor Selina was surprised when the secretary produced three resignations. It was a matter of co-opting three new members, but members were slow in putting forward their suggestions as they hesitated to condemn their friends or acquaintances to four hours of smokeless sitting every second Tuesday. But Selina was ready. She rose to propose the names of three of her politically-conscious and non-smoking female acquaintance. There were no other nominations, and Selina's friends were duly elected. By the end of the year all the original members had resigned, and Selina and her friends had gained complete control of the Electric Power Board. And it was an easy matter to apply similar tactics to other public bodies.

**ALL** that now remained for Selina was to see that sufficient women were elected to positions of Parliamentary responsibility. So far, women had made little progress in this direction, but that was not to be wondered at, considering that it was many years since there had been a general election. And though Selina had persuaded the existing women M.P.'s to take a stern line in regard to masculine smoking, this had failed to achieve its object, for Parliamentarians had learnt their lesson from the Electric Power Board, and not only insisted on smoking but had taken to eating peanuts as well. Of course it would have been possible for Selina and her friends, who by now controlled the Hospital Board, the Harbour Board, the Electric Power Board, and the Tramway Corporation, to make use of their power to make life uncomfortable, in fact, impossible, for the present M.P.'s, but Selina refused to use any means that smacked of dictatorship or was in any way unconstitutional. And besides, she was not yet sure that if all the present M.P.'s resigned she would find enough women aware of their Civic Responsibility to fill the vacancies.



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Why was it, Selina asked herself, that so many women still seemed to prefer to remain quietly in their homes rather than achieve for themselves a glorious political career?

Suddenly the answer to the question leapt into Selina's groping brain. Why hadn't she thought of that before?

When an architect designs a modern house, he pays particular attention to the kitchen. He realises that a woman will have to spend a certain amount of time in it, and therefore he makes it one of the most attractive rooms in the house. The same principle must be applied to the Houses of Parliament. If women were to be expected to work in them they must be made as attractive as possible. Those hideous red carpets, that yellow woodwork, those flights of cold, white marble steps must all be abolished. Cushioned divans must replace the hard benches of the House of Representatives, and glazed chintzes those funereal velvet hangings.

Hastily, Selina summoned to her the three women M.P.'s. Together they laid their plans. They would begin by asking one thing at a time, perhaps to begin with that the walls of Bellamy's should be painted primrose (no political significance, they would assure the Honourable Members). Then, perhaps, some flowered cretonne for the windows, and a carpet in tones of beige.

**IT** was some time before the members, sunk in the somnolence of long office-bearing, woke up to the significance of the changes that were taking place about them. The horse-hair furniture had disappeared completely from the rooms of the Opposition, and in its place appeared squat, square chairs gaily upholstered in stripped terry-towelling. The worn red carpets were no longer in evidence, and the cold marble of the stairs was hidden by a carpet of conventionalised floral design in green and yellow. At intervals along the lengthy corridors palm-surrounded garden seats surmounted by gay umbrellas invited a moment's repose, and in the middle of the building, by the lift, a fountain sprayed up and tinkled down into a rock pool gay with goldfish and water-lilies.

Selina had done her job thoroughly. Pictures of the interior of the newly-renovated Houses of Parliament had been reproduced in all the fashionable

(Continued on next page)



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