

MAY 21, 1943

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Votes for Women

A HASTY reading of the opinions expressed on Pages 4 and 5 might suggest that the women of New Zealand do not value their political privileges, and would not be greatly disturbed if they lost them. The truth is almost the exact opposite of this: the vote is so much a part of their lives that they don't remember when it came to them, and when they are asked to think what life would be like without it they can't find their way through such an unreal world. There are of course women still living who remember those days of darkness, who took part in the battle for liberation, and who can still recall the thrill of the first universal vote. One of them has some interesting things to say in this issue. But they are not numerous and they are not typical. To women in general in New Zealand the right to vote is as natural, as necessary, but as unexciting as the right to read the newspapers and send their children free to school. It is not possible to think of even curtailing the right—by raising the voting age, for example—and if a proposal were made to take it away altogether no one would get agitated because no one would believe that such madness could be advocated seriously. And it makes no difference at all that so few women take an active part in politics. Not many women take an active part in religion or education or law or medicine. Until 1939 hardly any had taken an active part in war. But the bearing of all those things on their lives is as well understood by the calmest woman as by the most excited man, and it would be getting the whole picture out of focus to assume that when they don't speak they don't care. There is in fact no one in Zealand, male or female, who would say in 1943 that democracy could be maintained on the votes of men alone. It would be as sensible to say that a bird could fly with one wing or a tree grow straight if the wind blew one way only.

NEW ZEALAND LISTENER, MAY 21

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

THE HOMING INSTINCT

Sir,—The interesting article "The Homing Instinct" in your issue of May 7 rightly points out that "something must be done if peace is not to bring one vast, chaotic trek."

Re "J.J.'s" description of the magnitude of the tasks facing the Bermuda Conference, I would like to touch upon some omissions, especially with reference to my country. Although he admits that Russia and Poland are, in particular, represented amongst "the dispossessed," there is a substantial difference in the problems facing these two countries, especially as regards post-war rehabilitation problems. Even during the last year of the German offensive, a very substantial part of European Russia was still unoccupied, and provided means of shelter for millions of Russians who fled from German-occupied Russian territory. Poland, who was the first country to repel the German aggression, had to pay the heaviest price ever paid by a nation for putting up a stubborn resistance. Apart from massacres and mass executions, these unexcelled deportations of Polish people have been going on for nearly four years.

Of the six million people in forced labour at present in Germany, about two million male and female Poles were forcibly conscripted and sent there. More than one and a-half million Poles in the Western part of Poland annexed to the Reich, where Poles had been living for hundreds of years, were deported to the General Government (Central Poland); their farms, factories, workshops, and homes have been handed to the 300,000 Germans who arrived there, not as "J.J." says, before the present war commenced, but from late in 1939 onwards. Thus forcible expulsion is still going on into the already over-populated area of Central Poland, an artificially-created economic unit without any of its natural outlets.

While stressing the plight of the Jewish people, "J.J." did not mention that besides 1,200,000 Polish Jews already killed since the outbreak of the war, the majority of Western European Jews and the remainder of nearly 2,000,000 Polish Jews, after having been transferred to the ghettos of the Polish cities, were recently removed to Russian territories under the harshest of conditions.

Last and not least, there are more than one and a-half million Poles who were deported from Russian-occupied Poland in 1940 and 1941 to Siberia and Central Asia.

"Therefore, much depends on the present Bermuda Conference" as to whether the proposals of the Atlantic Charter will be kept, in giving to all these people the first freedom of all—the possibility and means to return to their countries to begin afresh.—DR. K. A. WODZICKI (Consul-General for Poland).

"THE PARIAH" REPLIES

Sir,—Having been pursued by Bears, Dutchmen, Seadogs and young females of the species, I am going to exercise my privilege to have a final snap at them

before retiring to my kennel. Nothing they have said has convinced me that I had anything to regret in walking out of Shakespeare or to be ashamed of in making my action public. They tell me, quite irrelevantly, that every time I open my mouth I speak Shakespeare. I have never denied it: for that matter I expect I also sometimes speak Chaucer and the Bible. "The Bear" declares that Shakespeare had "a perfectly good reason" for writing his women's parts to be played by men, because women were not welcomed on the stage in Elizabethan England. Exactly: doesn't that perfectly support my own point that his plays were "written to be produced for his day and age" and, to this extent anyway, seem unnatural when produced in ours?

But as I said in my original "confession," I've done with defensive fighting. You see, when I walked out of *Twelfth Night* it was mostly an instinctive reaction of protest against the traditional belief in which I had been reared that Shakespeare occupies a place pretty close to God, but I've since found authority to support me in what I did far better than anything the pack at my heels has produced. For the comfort of other lonely souls who may wish they had followed me, and for the mortification of the Shakespearean-addicts, I recommend Tolstoy's essay (written after he had read and re-read all Shakespeare's plays in several languages over a period of 50 years to make certain he hadn't missed anything), in which he arrives at the "firm indubitable conviction" that Shakespeare "cannot be recognised either as a great genius or even as an average author," and that his fame depends on a form of "hypnotic suggestion," a tradition of blind adoration built up over many years. I wouldn't go nearly as far as Tolstoy myself (I still think Shakespeare's a great genius of a kind)—but, oh boy, to one who has never believed in the divine right of kings, his essay makes fine reading! In the same healthy rebellious spirit I also recommend (if you can get it), an essay by Ernest H. Crosby on "Shakespeare and the Working Classes," which sets out to show that Shakespeare was an aristocratic toady, who fawned on all of high degree but seldom expressed anything except scorn and contumely for those of lowly birth, and who was quite untouched by the rising spirit of revolt against authority that only a few years later was to produce Hampden and the Civil War. See also Bernard Shaw on Shakespeare. In such good company I feel that I need no longer regard myself as—"THE PARIAH" (Wellington).

(We did not expect that "The Pariah," in closing this controversy, would introduce two new issues, (1) Shakespeare's position in general, (2) his attitude to the so-called lower classes. No good purpose would be served by a discussion of (1), but brief letters will be accepted on the subject of (2)—Ed.]

POINT FROM LETTER *

D. Lloyd (Cambridge) points out (in a letter that we inadvertently overlooked), that Polar bears do not come from "the deep, deep, south," but from the cold, cold, north.

ANSWER TO CORRESPONDENT

R. W. Fisher: American Society of Cinematographers.

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