

IMPRISONMENT OF THE ENGLISH WOMAN SUFFRAGISTS.*

Letter of Mr. Cobden-Sanderson to the London Chronicle.

On entering the prison my wife was stripped of all her things save her wedding ring, and redressed in the clothing of the prison; and, in place of her name, was numbered with a number which is now her name, deprived of all associations save those of the prison which is now her new and silent world. Her food—she is a vegetarian—consists of dry bread, tea or cocoa and potatoes. She is in solitary confinement for twenty-three hours out of the twenty-four. For one hour, in silence, she is—with other prisoners, six feet apart—walked backwards and forwards in a yard in the prison enclosure. In her cell she has for occupation the making of postmen's bags. For reading, the Bible—that book of Revolutions! What a mockery!—and a book called "A Healthy Home," which, she says with a smile, is of no use to her there. She asked for a Shakespeare; there was but one volume in the prison and that was engaged. She asked for pen and paper that she might right down her meditations. That was refused; it was against the prison regulations.

She asked me—it was her only request—to apply to the Home Secretary on her behalf, and on behalf of all "prisoners and captives," to be allowed the use of pen and paper and ink, wherewith to deliver themselves of their thoughts, burning within them all day and all night, and unutterable. She makes no complaint for herself, but in isolation prays for the cause of women. Will that prayer be answered? Is there, then, no soul of woman really, no anything in the world? A world of shadows only? No man of heart, of genius, to bid all legislation stop, and the world's vain turmoil cease, till woman shall have stepped with the help of man to where man stands, that, hand in hand, and heart in heart, they may together climb the steep path of life?

Such, O foolish world and vain! such, if you will hear it, is the appeal, voiceless now, of the daughter of him who gave you bread.

T. COBDEN-SANDERSON.

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Letter of Mr. Bernard Shaw to the London Times.

This is a terrible moment in our national life. We are not often thoroughly frightened. When England trembles the world knows that a great peril overshadows our island.

It is not the first time that we have faced dangers that have made even our gayest and bravest clench their teeth and hold their breath. We watched the Armada creeping slowly up the Channel. We wiped our brow when chance revealed the treason of Guy Fawkes. We are listening even now for the bugle of the German invader, and scanning the waves we rule for the periscope of the French sub-marine.

But until now we have faced our fate like men, with our Parliament unshaken in our midst, grandly calm as the Roman Senators who sat like statues when Brennus and his barbarians charged blood-stained into their hall. When Charles Bradlaugh,

the most muscular man in England, dashed into the House of Commons to claim a seat in that august assembly, the police carried him, titanically struggling, down the stairs, deposited him in the yard with a shattered fountain pen and disdainfully set him free to do his worst.

It was but the other day that a desperado arose in the Strangers' Gallery of the House of Commons and burst into disorderly eloquence. Without a moment's hesitation the dauntless attendants hurled themselves upon him and extruded him from our Legislature. He was not haled before the magistrate; he was not imprisoned; no man deigned to ask securities for his good behavior; the British lion scorned protection against so puny an antagonist.

But the strongest nerves give way at last. The warriors of Phillip were, when all is said, only men. German soldiers, French bluejackets, Guy Fawkes, Bradlaugh, and the stranger in the gallery, bold and dangerous as they were, were no females. The peril to-day wears a darker, deadlier aspect.

Ten women—ten petticoated, long-stockinged, corseted females—have hurled themselves on the British Houses of Parliament. Desperate measures are necessary. I have a right to speak in this matter, because it was in my play, "Man and Superman," that my sex were first warned of woman's terrible strength and man's miserable weakness.

It is a striking confirmation of the correctness of my views that the measures which have always been deemed sufficient to protect the House of Commons against men are not to be trusted against women. Take, for example, the daughters of Richard Cobden, long known to everybody worth knowing in London as among the most charming and interesting women of our day. One of them—one only, and she the slightest and rosiest of the family—did what the herculean Charles Bradlaugh did.

To the immortal glory of our metropolitan police, they did not blench. They carried the lady out, even as they carried Bradlaugh. But they did not dare to leave her at large as they left him. They held on to her like grim death until they had her safe under bolt and bar, until they had stripped her to see that she had no weapons concealed, until a temperate diet of bread and cocoa should have abated her perilous forces. She—and the rest of the terrible ten.

For the moment we have time to breathe. But has the Government considered the fact that, owing to the imperfections of our law, these ladies will be at large again before many weeks are passed? I ask, in the name of the public, whether proper precautions have been taken. It is not enough for Mr. Herbert Gladstone, Mr. Haldane, Mr. Asquith and Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman to sit there pale and determined, with drawn lips and folded arms, helplessly awaiting a renewal of the assault—an assault the consequences of which no man can foresee.

It is their duty without a moment's delay to quadruple the police staff inside the Houses of Parliament. Westminster and Vauxhall Bridges should be strongly held by the Guards. If necessary, special constables should be enrolled. I am no coward, but I do not want to see a repetition of the folly that found us unprepared in 1899.

I submit, however, that if these precautions are

*See "The Woman Suffrage Agitation in England," page 801 of The Public of Nov. 24.

taken, we might, perhaps, venture to let Mrs. Cobden-Sanderson and her friends out. As a taxpayer, I object to having to pay for her bread and cocoa when her husband is not only ready, but apparently even anxious, to provide a more generous diet at home. After all, if Mr. Cobden-Sanderson is not afraid, surely the rest of us may pluck up a little.

We owe something to Mr. Cobden-Sanderson, both as one of our most distinguished artist craftsmen and as a most munificent contributor in crises where public interests have been at stake. If Mrs. Cobden-Sanderson must remain a prisoner while the Home Secretary is too paralyzed with terror to make that stroke of the pen for which every sensible person in the three kingdoms is looking to him, why on earth cannot she be imprisoned in her own house? We should still look ridiculous, but at least the lady would not be a martyr.

I suppose nobody in the world really wishes to see one of the nicest women in England suffering from the coarsest indignity and the most injurious form of ill-treatment that the law could inflict on a pickpocket. It gives us an air of having lost our tempers and made fools of ourselves, and of being incapable of acting generously now that we have had time to come to our senses. Surely, there can be no two opinions among sane people as to what we ought to do.

Will not the Home Secretary rescue us from a ridiculous, an intolerable, and, incidentally, a revoltingly spiteful and unmanly situation.

G. BERNARD SHAW.

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THE IMPERIALISM OF SEX.

Editorial by John Geo. Godard, in the (London) *New Age* of Nov. 15, 1906.

"I don't acknowledge the authority of this Court so long as I have no part in making the laws which I am supposed to obey. I am a rebel because I am an outlaw."—Mrs. Cobden-Sanderson.

In these words, recently addressed by an energetic "Suffragist" to a magistrate, we have the key to the entire case for female suffrage. No rights, no obligation; no privilege, no responsibility. A person who is denied any voice in the government does not owe it allegiance; to withhold all legislative power, and yet to punish for a breach of legislation resolves itself into pure tyranny. Men make the laws, men administer the laws; and yet they positively expect women to obey them, and inflict penalties for disobedience. Woman is good enough to tax, to fine, to imprison, to hang; but woman is not good enough to vote. The equality of the sexes is recognized on the rate book, at the police court, in the gaol, and on the gallow; but it is not recognized at the polling booth. This is despotism, and there is no other name for it.

The imperialism of the sex—that is the meaning of man-rule. Empire, we have been rightly told, is the predominance of race; it is the rule of one people by another people, involving, of course, the subjection of the former to the latter. And exclusive male suffrage is the predominance of sex; it is the rule of women by men—likewise involving the subjection of the former to the latter. Our sisters at home are governed precisely as 95 per cent. of our

subjects abroad are governed; that is to say, they are ruled by us, and have practically no voice in their own government. And the principle is equally vicious and indefensible in both cases. The grievance of the Indian Bengalee and the grievance of the English woman are the same; and it has its origin largely in conceit. We think we can govern other races better than they can govern themselves; we think we can govern women better than they can govern themselves. And, wrapped in this conceit, we fail to realize that, even if we could govern better, that is no ethical justification for withholding self-government from those who demand it.

Imperialism, whether of race or of sex, would stand a poor chance if we could only adequately reverse the position in our own minds. Let the Englishman imagine himself as being absolutely ruled by another nation, or as being absolutely ruled by the other sex, in either case having no direct political power, and he would make short work of the casuistry he now employs to defend his actual supremacy. Tell him that he would be better off, and he would reply that he is the best judge of his own interests, and that he claims the right to be the judge. And he would have logic and equity on his side—just as the women have to-day.

In truth the question of whether alien government is good or bad is only of secondary importance—the point is that in either case it is despotic. As a matter of fact, alien government is seldom good; but the gist of the indictment of Imperialism, whether of race or of sex, is that it is inimical to liberty—it is the denial to others of the rights or privileges claimed for oneself. It is no answer either to the Indian Congress or the British Suffragists to say that they are well governed. Both will dispute it (and with a considerable show of reason), but their complaint is that they are not permitted (as are English men) to govern themselves. This is not a question of respective spheres, or of physical distinctions; it is one of political equality. Laws are necessary for the existence and preservation of society; citizenship is common to all who live in societies, and depends neither upon nationality nor upon sex; and the common obligations demand the common rights, the common restraint calls for the common liberty.

Of course, with those who deny the doctrine of political equality and the doctrine of liberty, argument is useless, unless it be the argumentum baculum—the reason, possibly, why some of the more ardent female reformers assume the role of amazons. But to the political party now in power, to the great historic Liberal party, government based on distinction of sex should be abhorrent, since the very foundation of their faith consists in these doctrines. It is frequently said that Female Suffrage is not a party question. True, the reform is supported by many Conservatives, which only shows that some men are better than their creed; for the Conservative party is the party, not of political equality, but of political privilege, not of liberty, but of monopoly. The sad, significant fact, however, is that many Liberals are worse than their creed; that just as they deserted their principles by supporting the subjugation of another nation and by concurring in the destruction of its independence, so