

“MADAM CHAIR”

WHEN the Black Sash has finished with us, we, the women of this country, will be considerably nearer the angels than we are at this moment. As, under the influence of our movement, we grow in mental stature and understanding, a host of new virtues will be added unto us and a new standard of female excellence will emerge!

Imagine the woman of the future! Truly feminine—and a shining example of the perfect housewife—in addition she will be logical, wise and well-informed—aware of her civic duties and competent and eager to exercise them. It will be nothing to her to take over the Chair at a difficult meeting. She will have her facts at her finger ends and the situation under control, and she will confound her opponents and disarm all criticism with “the sweet reason of her discourse.” She will rally to all good causes; prejudice and abuse will go down before the vigour of her approach and she and her sister will fight the good fight together in harmony and perfect accord!

Given time, the Black Sash will succeed in producing this new race of superwomen—no one can doubt that for a minute. We meanwhile have to struggle with present problems as best we can, so, before we lose touch with reality by too many glimpses into the Utopian future, let us look back a little and dwell with sympathy on the trials of that band of innocent enthusiasts—the original branch Chairs of the Black Sash movement!

In a moment of high resolve with the words of a Foley or a Sinclair ringing in their ears, they undertook to organise their districts and hurried home glowing with ardour to get on with the job. They may have been somewhat dampened by the family's reception of their news, but the glow probably lasted until after bedtime. Towards the small hours the potential branch Chair awoke—awoke to a clearer realisation of what she had undertaken! And with panic in her breast and her face buried in her pillow she explored all possible avenues of escape, from emigration to suicide, until the dawn broke. However, to do the poor creature justice she stuck to her guns and in any case things looked brighter in the morning light after a constructive chat with the right kind of neighbour. By lunch time, with a donation in her pocket and two unsolicited offers of help, life was positively worth living again!

WHAT SORT OF ANIMAL?

But queries and difficulties cropped up on every side. In the first place—What kind of an animal was a branch Chair? How did it conduct itself? From whence came its authority and how far did that authority extend? One could not go to bed as Mrs. So-and-so and wake up a branch Chair—some process of creation was clearly necessary, but it seemed that she herself must be the creator—she must call into existence first the branch—then the Chair—and combine the two in her own person! It was all too reminiscent of the first chapter of Genesis without

benefit of the Seventh Day, and it was cold comfort to reflect that she had brought these problems down on her own head.

Very soon she found herself ground between the upper and nether mill stones of executive enthusiasm and local apathy. From the executive came a stream of breezy directives, most of them beginning something like this—

“Branch Chairs will please make sure that”
or

“Urgent . . . for the attention of Branch Chairs.”

Meanwhile, by the local firesides this kind of conversation was taking place—

SHE: “I've had **another** letter from Mrs. X! I suppose I ought to **do** something about it.”

HE: “You know my opinion of the Government—throw the lot out, I'd say! But I'm not prepared to see **MY WIFE** running over the countryside dressed up in a black sash!”

Sometimes the response was warmer, and so the branch took shape.

Some of the newly hatched Chairs, of course, were sufficiently experienced not to be harassed by their duties but the majority were apprehensive of the meetings they had to take and shied uneasily

ORDER NOW!

YOUR COPIES OF

THE BLACK SASH

By

MIRABEL ROGERS

“The story of our first year makes fascinating reading” says Ruth Foley

110 PHOTOGRAPHS

25 CARTOONS

!! ALL PROFITS TO THE BLACK SASH !!

Place your orders at once with your Branch or Regional Treasurer

AVAILABLE IN OCTOBER

AND

REMEMBER CHRISTMAS IS COMING

away from the thought of themselves as "Madam Chair." They had been prepared for plenty of hard work and even a mild degree of martyrdom, but it was disconcerting to find that it was not enough to be prepared to act as an individual on strong personal convictions, it was necessary to climb on to the nearest soap box and bear public witness of those convictions, however inadequately. The average woman wilts when she is faced with an audience and plenty of embryo Chairs lost their appetites and their beauty sleep at the thought of those initial branch meetings!

NUISANCE VALUE

Then again, from some points of view it would have been easier to have organised Timbuctoo or the North Pole rather than the immediate neighbourhood. In pre-sash days it had been possible to be a placid citizen of one's chosen plot, living on terms of friendly detachment with the neighbours. One was now committed to disturb the peace, to swoop down like a gadfly on all and sundry, to keep up one's shock tactics until the victim showed some positive reaction! Pleasant social contacts went by the board, a phone call from a branch Chair no longer meant a morning's tennis or a cosy expedition to town; it meant that she was preparing to make a nuisance of herself. Pity the poor branch Chair! She was only too conscious of her rising

nuisance value, but because she was over-keen, on edge, and missing her own relaxations anyhow, she could think of no better remedy than that of redoubling her gadfly activities, until even her best friends sighed when they saw her coming! Her own home was no longer a place of retreat. It was knee-deep in propaganda, the telephone shrilled incessantly and the family was beginning to wear that long suffering look that in her experience always preceded an ultimatum—she felt herself at one with Hamlet in his bitter lament—"The time is out of joint: O cursed spite, that ever I was born to set it right!" She had of course quite lost sight of the fact that no one person can ever put anything "right." One can only bear down heavily on what one believes to be the right side of the scale, and then stop fretting about possible results. If sufficient energy is expended to move a mountain and a few molehills result, one must learn to be grateful for the molehills! A sense of proportion is the redeeming possession of the person who sees that things are wrong and tries to do something about them, and when the Black Sash finally gets round to writing its hand-book on which the future Black Sash superwomen will cut their executive teeth, the first chapter should surely be headed "A sense of proportion—and how to keep it."

A BRANCH CHAIR.

Queries From Enquirers

Middelburg, Cape, has sent us a set of eleven questions which they have asked the Black Sash to answer for them every month. This month we answer the first three.

Branches, Regions, or members who feel that they also have questions they would like answered are asked to send them in to the Editor. We do not guarantee to be able to answer all questions put to us, but we will do our best to oblige.

MIDDELBURG, CAPE, asks:

"What is a democracy?"

A democracy is rule of the people for the people by the people.

The operative word is PEOPLE.

In other words, the government should be chosen by all the people, and should truly represent all the people. A democratic government should concern itself with the well-being of all its people, and not that of privileged groups.

With the right constitution a democracy can exist:—

- (a) Under a king.
- (b) Under a president.
- (c) Under a prime minister.

A democracy can exist only:—

- (a) When its people can move about freely.
- (b) When its people can speak openly and fully.
- (c) When its people can associate freely.
- (d) When the people can express their opinions by voting.
- (e) When all its people are subject to the same just laws.

The Black Sash now asks a counter question: "Is South Africa a democratic country?"

MIDDELBURG, CAPE, asks:

How many votes were polled in the last general election?

- (a) By the Government?
- (b) By Opposition Parties?

The Government polled approximately
600,000 votes for 86 seats.

The Opposition polled approximately
700,000 votes for 44 seats.

Two Government seats were returned unopposed.
Eighteen Opposition seats were returned unopposed.

South West African voters elected six members with votes worth **three times** as much as the South African citizens.

In round figures, estimating the unopposed seats, the Government won 94 seats with 639,400 votes, the Opposition 62 seats with 763,000 votes.