

Outside the Gates.

WOMEN.



The *Queen* says:—"For the first time in the history of the British Empire, a Parliamentary election has been held in which the votes of women have been taken as equivalent to those of men. The women have recently obtained the Parliamentary franchise in New Zealand, and they have now for the first time exercised it. It is said that the greatest interest and activity have been exercised in placing the names of the enfranchised women on the roll, and that their attendance at the polling-places in order to vote for the candidates of their choice was the cause of great excitement and very considerable enthusiasm. There was in some quarters considerable doubt as to the mode in which the new voters would exercise their privileges. It was thought by many that they might vote solely from a consideration of sex; but of this there appears to have been no indication.

Fears were also expressed that the women might import into politics reactionary influences; but, on the contrary, they have supported the Government, and have confirmed the political opinion of the men by whom they have been hitherto represented. It is true that of the seventy members elected by the European colonists and their descendants nearly one half have been changed. Nevertheless, all the old members of the Ministry have been returned, although thirty-three members have been elected who were not in the last Parliament. In this sense, the vote of the women may be regarded as Conservative, as far as regards the Government and the Ministry that previously existed; but, on the other hand, the Government which has received their support is the most Radical that New Zealand has known for many years. It supports the policy of secular education, to which women have generally been believed to be opposed. It was imagined again, on some hands, that the women's vote would have a strong influence on the liquor question; but they have not expressed themselves with the sweeping decision that was expected of them. What is called local option as to the closing of houses of entertainment was one of the subjects brought forward very strongly at the election; but of the seventy-four members of Parliament—namely, seventy Europeans and four Maori members—only twenty-four have been returned who uphold the principles of the direct veto of licences by the decision of a bare majority. With one exception, the best men in the ranks of the Conservative Opposition have been returned to Parliament—a fact that speaks very well for the discrimination of the new voters.

As far as regards the establishment of female suffrage, it is doubtful whether any other place could have been selected where it could have been tried under more favourable circumstances than in New Zealand. The number of women is considerably less than that of men. The preponderance of those who may be termed the ignorant voters—which is so marked in many countries where there has been a great extension of the suffrage—is much less marked

in New Zealand than in any other British community. The people are better educated, and the women on this occasion have certainly shown that they have carefully exercised their judgment as to the individuals for whom they voted. Whether the example is a valid one, as far as regards our own country, where the preponderance of women is very considerable, may be a subject of doubt. But the first election in New Zealand, although the individuals composing the Parliament are changed to a very large extent, is one that has returned the old Government to power with even a stronger majority than before."

Science Notes.

THE INFLUENCE OF VEGETATION ON THE ATMOSPHERE.

It is a familiar fact to almost every one that plants are dependent for their existence on the atmosphere, and that the atmosphere suffers change as a result of their living in it. Many persons have a prejudice against the presence of plants in a bedroom, and some even profess to support their objections by an appeal to science; possibly they are examples of the adage, "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing."

The facts of the case appear to be as follows:—All plants as well as all animals require carbon with which to build up their bodies; while animals derive their carbon from feeding on other animals or on vegetables, the majority of plants obtain carbon by decomposing the carbon dioxide present in the atmosphere; therefore, they destroy the gas which is harmful to animal life, and return to the air, in a free state, part at least of the oxygen which was previously combined with carbon. So far, plant life evidently exerts an influence beneficial to animals. This carbon assimilation must not, however, be confused—as it often is—with the process of respiration. All parts of a plant act as respiratory organs, taking in air and expelling the oxygen again in the form of carbon dioxide. The inability of most plants to live in a soil continually saturated with water is perhaps due in part to oxygen starvation, as a porous soil will allow air to reach the roots of a plant. By their respiration, therefore, plants vitiate the air as animals do; hence, as a result of this process and that of feeding combined, they simultaneously produce and destroy carbon dioxide, or, in other words, they both deprive the atmosphere of oxygen and supply oxygen to it.

During the presence of daylight the oxygen returned as a result of carbon assimilation far exceeds in volume that removed in the process of respiration. During darkness, carbon assimilation altogether ceases while respiration continues; this is the fact quoted to prove that plants are harmful in a bedroom, but those who quote appear ignorant of the extreme feebleness of respiration in plants compared with that of animals. A window-full of plants will produce less carbon dioxide during the night than a single mouse, and although many persons would object to the little animal's company in a bedroom, probably none would base their objection on the vitiation of the atmosphere consequent on its presence.

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