

**PRESS CUTTINGS, A TOPICAL
SKETCH FROM THE EDITORIAL
AND CORRESPONDENCE
COLUMNS OF THE DAILY PRESS**

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Press cuttings, a topical sketch from the editorial and correspondence columns of the daily press
by Bernard Shaw

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By

BERNARD SHAW



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PRESS CUTTINGS.

The forenoon of the first of April, 1911.

General Mitchener is at his writing table in the War Office, opening letters. On his left is the fireplace, with a fire burning. On his right, against the opposite wall is a standing desk with an office stool. The door is in the wall behind him, half way between the table and the desk. The table is not quite in the middle of the room: it is nearer to the hearthrug than to the desk. There is a chair at each end of it for persons having business with the general. There is a telephone on the table. Long silence.

A VOICE OUTSIDE. Votes for Women!

The General starts convulsively; snatches a revolver from a drawer, and listens in an agony of apprehension. Nothing happens. He puts the revolver back, ashamed; wipes his brow; and resumes his work. He is startled afresh by the entry of an Orderly. This Orderly is an unsoldierly, slovenly, discontented young man.

MITCHENER. Oh, it's only you. Well?

THE ORDERLY. Another one, sir. Shes chained herself.

MITCHENER. Chained herself? How? To what? Weve taken away the railings and everything that a chain can be passed through.

THE ORDERLY. We forgot the doorscraper, sir. She laid down on the flags and got the chain through before she started hollerin. Shes lying there now; and she says that youve got the key of the padlock in a letter

in a buff envelope, and that you will see her when you open it.

MITCHENER. Shes mad. Have the scraper dug up and let her go home with it hanging round her neck.

THE ORDERLY. Theres a buff envelope there, sir.

MITCHENER. Youre all afraid of these women (*picking the letter up*). It does seem to have a key in it. (*He opens the letter, and takes out a key and a note.*) "Dear Mitch"—Well, I'm dashed!

THE ORDERLY. Yes sir.

MITCHENER. What do you mean by Yes sir?

THE ORDERLY. Well, you said you was dashed, sir; and you did look if youll excuse my saying it, Sir—well, you looked it.

MITCHENER (*who has been reading the letter, and is too astonished to attend to the Orderlys reply*). This is a letter from the Prime Minister asking me to release the woman with this key if she padlocks herself, and to have her shown up and see her at once.

THE ORDERLY (*tremulously*). Dont do it, governor.

MITCHENER (*angrily*). How often have I ordered you not to address me as governor. Remember that you are a soldier and not a vulgar civilian. Remember also that when a man enters the army he leaves fear behind him. Heres the key. Unlock her and show her up.

THE ORDERLY. Me unlock her! I dursent. Lord knows what she'd do to me.

MITCHENER (*pepperily, rising*). Obey your orders instantly, Sir, and dont presume to argue. Even if she kills you, it is your duty to die for your country. Right about face. March. (*The Orderly goes out, trembling.*)

THE VOICE OUTSIDE. Votes for Women! Votes for Women! Votes for Women!

MITCHENER (*mimicking her*). Votes for Women! Votes for Women! Votes for Women! (*in his natural voice*) Votes for children! Votes for babies! Votes

for monkeys! (*He posts himself on the hearthrug, and awaits the enemy.*)

THE ORDERLY (*outside*). In you go. (*He pushes a panting Suffraget into the room.*) The person sir. (*He withdraws.*)

The Suffraget takes off her tailor made skirt and reveals a pair of fashionable trousers.

MITCHENER (*horrified*). Stop, madam. What are you doing? You must not undress in my presence. I protest. Not even your letter from the Prime Minister—

THE SUFFRAGET. My dear Mitchener: I am the Prime Minister. (*He tears off his hat and cloak; throws them on the desk; and confronts the General in the ordinary costume of a Cabinet minister.*)

MITCHENER. Good heavens! Balsquith!

BALSQUITH (*throwing himself into Mitchener's chair*). Yes: it is indeed Balsquith. It has come to this: that the only way that the Prime Minister of England can get from Downing Street to the War Office is by assuming this disguise; shrieking "VOTES for Women"; and chaining himself to your doorscraper. They were at the corner in force. They cheered me. Bellachristina herself was there. She shook my hand and told me to say I was a vegetarian, as the diet was better in Holloway for vegetarians.

MITCHENER. Why didnt you telephone?

BALSQUITH. They tap the telephone. Every switchboard in London is in their hands or in those of their young men.

MITCHENER. Where on Earth did you get that dress?

BALSQUITH. I stole it from a little Exhibition got up by my wife in Downing Street.

MITCHENER. You dont mean to say its a French dress?

BALSQUITH. Great Heavens, no. My wife isnt allowed even to put on her gloves with French chalk.

Everything labelled Made in Camberwell. She advised me to come to you. And what I have to say must be said here to you personally, in the most intimate confidence, with the most urgent persuasion. Mitchener: Sandstone has resigned.

MITCHENER (*amazed*). Old Red resigned!

BALSQUITH. Resigned.

MITCHENER. But how? Why? Oh, impossible! the proclamation of martial law last Tuesday made Sandstone virtually Dictator in the metropolis, and to resign now is flat desertion.

BALSQUITH. Yes, yes, my dear Mitchener; I know all that as well as you do; I argued with him until I was black in the face and he so red about the neck that if I had gone on he would have burst. He is furious because we have abandoned his plan.

MITCHENER. But you accepted it unconditionally.

BALSQUITH. Yes, before we knew what it was. It was unworkable, you know.

MITCHENER. I *don't* know. Why is it unworkable?

BALSQUITH. I mean the part about drawing a cordon round Westminster at a distance of two miles; and turning all women out of it.

MITCHENER. A masterpiece of strategy. Let me explain. The Suffragets are a very small body; but they are numerous enough to be troublesome—even dangerous—when they are all concentrated in one place—say in Parliament Square. But by making a two-mile radius and pushing them beyond it, you scatter their attack over a circular line twelve miles long. A superb piece of tactics. Just what Wellington would have done.

BALSQUITH. But the women wont go.

MITCHENER. Nonsense: they must go.

BALSQUITH. They wont.

MITCHENER. What does Sandstone say?

BALSQUITH. He says: Shoot them down.

MITCHENER. Of course.

BALSQUITH. Youre not serious?

MITCHENER. Im perfectly serious.

BALSQUITH. But you cant shoot them down! Women, you know!

MITCHENER (*straddling confidently*). Yes you can. Strange as it may seem to you as a civilian, Balsquith, if you point a rifle at a woman and fire it, she will drop exactly as a man drops.

BALSQUITH. But suppose your own daughters—Helen and Georgina.

MITCHENER. My daughters would not dream of disobeying the proclamation. (*As an after thought.*) At least Helen wouldnt.

BALSQUITH. But Georgina?

MITCHENER. Georgina would if she knew shed be shot if she didnt. Thats how the thing would work. Military methods are really the most merciful in the end. You keep sending these misguided women to Holloway and killing them slowly and inhumanly by ruining their health; and it does no good: they go on worse than ever. Shoot a few, promptly and humanly; and there will be an end at once of all resistance and of all the suffering that resistance entails.

BALSQUITH. But public opinion would never stand it.

MITCHENER (*walking about and laying down the law*). Theres no such thing as public opinion.

BALSQUITH. No such thing as public opinion! !

MITCHENER. Absolutely no such thing as public opinion. There are certain persons who entertain certain opinions. Well, shoot them down. When you have shot them down, there are no longer any persons entertaining those opinions alive: consequently there is no longer any more of the public opinion you are so much afraid of. Grasp that fact, my dear Balsquith; and you have grasped the secret of government. Public opinion is