



Mrs. John Blair, who has secured the consent of many New York employers to organize voters' classes for their employees, conducted one of the most interesting of the series on the stage of the Hippodrome for the benefit of an enthusiastic chorus

T H E S C H O O L F O R V O T E R S

THE day has gone by when a New York woman was classified as a blonde or a brunette and dated her new year from the first Sunday after the first full moon after the twenty-first of March when she acquired her Easter hat. In the new day which has taken the place of that antiquated era, the New York woman is classified as a Democrat or a Republican, and the time for which she waits with bated breath is the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November—otherwise, Election Day.

Last year New York State carried its Woman Suffrage Amendment by a majority of one hundred thousand. The Suffrage Party, instead of turning its headquarters into a tea room or a new Tammany Hall, decided to remain in existence, for educational purposes only, until it was assured that each new voter knew who she was, and why she was, and what she was going to do about it.

WHO THE NEW VOTER REALLY IS

Perhaps that sounds easier than it is. New York isn't bounded on the south by Thirty-fourth Street, with a Wall Street postscript at the end of a roaring subway. New York consists mainly, in fact, of such districts as the New Yorker seldom visits at all. The problem of educating the feminine voter has as little to do with the Telephone Directory as it has with the Social Register. For the average addition to the voters' lists, strange as it may seem, is quite below the financial level recognized by the switchboard operator. The story, then, is largely an affair of mean streets and swarming tenements, but, as the women recognize who are brave enough and untiring enough to attack the problem, only by educating the uneducated and Americanizing the foreigner can the peril of these mean streets—a peril that is now doubled

The Woman Suffrage Party of New York City
Sets Out to Educate the Five Hundred Thousand Women Added to the Voters' List
By the Passage of the Suffrage Amendment

—be met by the rest of New York. As well-born American women, we can never out-vote the immigrant; we must make her an all-American citizen and voter.

The Suffrage Party found that there were five hundred thousand new voters in New York city alone. Two hundred thousand of them were foreign-born women whose citizenship has been acquired automatically because Giuseppe Belmonte or Abraham J. Isaacstein went out one afternoon and got naturalized. Many of these women didn't even know that their husbands had taken out papers at all let alone the effect it had on them as wives. The new law, however, stated that any alien woman, naturalized through her husband and a resident of the United States for five years, was entitled to go into the sacred polling booth and take the sacred black lead pencil in her good right hand and make as many X's as her conscience demanded, provided she didn't attempt to force the same office on two different men. She didn't have to qualify as Giuseppe had done, by being able to speak English and by satisfying the court that she was of good moral character. She and Giuseppe were one; one qualifying was therefore sufficient.

For purposes of education—rather badly needed—the Woman Suffrage Party divided its energies into two eager and equal parts. One of them it called the Americanization Commit-

tee of the City of New York, with Miss Mary E. Dreier as Chairman, and the other, the Women Voters' Council proper, under the leadership of Miss Mary Garrett Hay, with Mrs. John Blair as Secretary.

To the hopeful lot of the Americanization Committee fell the two hundred thousand foreign-born women who must be reached largely through foreign language literature and foreign language classes. Lucia and Sonia and Rachel needed a good deal more instruction than that which had to do with the sacred booth and the sacred black lead pencil. They had landed at Ellis Island, to be sure, but their conceptions were those of Warsaw or Palermo. One of the initial steps in the Americanization campaign was to inaugurate a series of "first voters' parties" on the lower East Side.

"But how did you get the names?" the Secretary of the Committee was asked. "They hadn't registered, had they?"

"Oh, no," said Miss Esther Lape serenely. "But we had the list of men voters and we took a chance on their being married—a fairly safe chance to take down there, you know."

YOU VOTE—I VOTE—THEY VOTE

Rachel was one of the invited. Sixteen years ago when she first got over being frightened by the sound of the Second Avenue L, she went out and bought a pair of corsets from a push-cart man. She hadn't worn them but once, yet to her mind the very possession of them made her an American. She'd never been invited to an American party before, however, and, though years had made their subtle changes in Rachel, those American corsets simply had to be worn. Abraham came home in time to witness the transformation and was told the reason for it. "Voters' party? But you wasn't no voter,

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Rachel," he expostulated. "Men vote." "No, I vote," said Rachel. "Don't you not vote? You vote—I vote. The card says so."

Convinced against his will, the erstwhile undisputed lord of creation watched his Rachel depart partywards—and he wasn't even invited.

"It was a wonderful party," Miss Lape said. "First we gave them each a button that said, 'I'm a Voter.' They loved that. Then we had a talk on voting and what it would mean to them. It was in English, of course, but we had a good interpreter. The speaker told them about industrial laws for themselves and their children; she told them they could now tell their alderman what they thought of him and what they wanted—and he'd listen if they represented a group. We insisted on that group idea, for, of course, one solitary voter has no influence, man or woman. Then we gave them something to eat and they danced till one o'clock—peasant dances. Some of them hadn't danced in years, those old women in sweaters with two buttons. There were no men, but that didn't seem to matter."

RACHEL'S RIGHTS

Men have been apt to matter a bit too much on the East Side. If they would only go away and stay away, or else not go away at all—but no. The deserted wife is so apt to have a returning prodigal thrust upon her just when she least desires the added expense of a fatted calf. It was at a day nursery that one of the English classes was established, growing out of the voters' party. The women who attended—deserted wives in the main—were busy all day in the factory. At six o'clock they started for the nursery to take the young deserters home. After the children were in bed they came back again to study.

"Study!" said the woman to whom Miss Lape told all these things, "I wouldn't study, or read, or take a bath even, if I'd worked as hard as that. Would you?"

The old lady in charge of the nursery thought rather along the same line.

"They come—they vote—oh, yes," she said, shaking her head. "But what they want to know is mostly their rights. Why don't you get a lawyer down to them? They want to know when he come back next time, could they keek heem down stairs?"

The Americanization Committee believes, however, that the prodigal won't be apt to need such extreme measures. He will be afraid to impose his presence on a woman who is of New York, not of Warsaw, and who has American friends to whom she can appeal. The War Information centres established by the Americanization Committee have this purpose, as well as other purposes, in view. There are seventy-five of these centres in the densest aggregations of hyphenation, and they aim to be the go-between so needed by the Federal Food Board, the Fuel Administration, the War Risk Insurance Board, and indeed every agency that deals with Americans in the mass. In each of these centres there are people speaking the immigrants' own language; one is in a Russian settlement house, for example, and one in a Hungarian newspaper office.

But when Sonia has found out why Ivan was drafted and what the Government is prepared to do for her in return; when Abie, who swears he never meant to, is shown where, why, and how not to infringe the Food regulations; when little Teresina has ascertained that they can't really put her and the babies on the street because she got behind with the rent since they sent Tony to Camp Dix, but that, on the contrary, she's been the subject of a benevolent fairy called "The

Civil Rights Bill" and that another power known as the "War Committee of the Bar" will actually furnish her with a lawyer free of charge in any court difficulties—when all these multiplied details are attended to, the usefulness of the War Information Centre hasn't come to an end. In fact, it has only just begun. The object, you see, has been to make all these inhabitants of Lower Jewry, and Little Italy, and Poland, N. Y., into American citizens. And it isn't just head knowledge that will do this—it's heart sympathy; it's the understanding of American ideals, above all, it's personal contact with the best type of born-in-the-land Americans.

You've observed, perhaps, that we began with Americanizing the first voters, and now we're talking about whole neighborhoods. That, in fact, is just the way the work grew on the spot, as well as on paper.

"You come into a tenement house" Miss Lape explained, "and you find a hundred and twelve women. Twelve are voters. Wouldn't it be short-sighted to concentrate on that little dozen to the exclusion of the score who will come of age next year and may then vote, the other score whose husbands may make them voters by themselves being naturalized, the dozen or so unmarried women who are eligible to take out naturalization papers any time? No, the only logical thing to do is to try to Americanize the whole mass. But that isn't all. The men are almost as much in need of it as the women. They come just as eagerly to our information centres. That is why, when we send out the 'Information Bulletin for Voters' which is issued every week for the use of our advisers in these centres, we include information of every sort, from a paragraph on conditions in the street cleaning department up to the latest doings of Director General McAdoo in forming new express companies. There's a big fine-typed sheet of it and, as its name says, it covers, 'City—State—Nation.'"

So much for the Americanization Committee and its two hundred thousand wards, plus their unlimited relatives, dependents, and neighbours. The Women Voters' Council proper didn't stand idle when we left it alone on the first page. It plunged into plans for educating its share of the new voters—the three hundred thousand who can speak English.

THE ORGANIZATION BEHIND THE VICTORY

The Woman Suffrage Party is organized along truly party lines. The five boroughs have heads as active as those appointed by the ubiquitous Tammany tiger. Each assembly district has its leaders; each election district of three hundred and fifty voters has its captain. In such a manner the Woman Suffrage Party won its victory last November, and in such a manner does it undertake its educational campaign. The party will not take sides, will not name or endorse candidates; it will only tell the woman what a vote is, and why it is, and then leave it to her own judgment.

A series of four lessons was prepared under the direction of Mrs. John Blair. Big type was employed, short sentences, and simple English. Classes were held in community centres,—public schools, Red Cross clubs, parish houses, department stores, laundries, insurance companies, specialty shops, restaurants, tea rooms, women's clubs, banks—in short in every sort of place where a group of women could be reached. In one month alone three hundred and twelve such classes were held in New York City. The industrial classes all took place during employment hours, the attendance was purely voluntary, and there weren't any vacant chairs.

"Mr. Coatandskirt, wouldn't you welcome anything that would make your salespeople more intelligent?" a suffragist would ask pleasantly. "Many of them have the vote now, but they've never given it much thought. If they think about voting, they'll have all the better brains with which to think about selling."

Mr. Coatandskirt was impressed. But wouldn't such a class be apt to get into deep water politically? And would Mayme and Millie and Isadora ever really care about classes of any kind? One department store manager agreed to a single preliminary talk given to buyers and heads of departments. If they liked it, considered it innocuous politically, and could possibly imagine Mayme listening without a yawn, the series could be given. If not—

They came, three hundred and fifty very critical people, many of them men. They enjoyed it immensely. They not only voted for the class for Mayme, but they asked if they couldn't be included.

"The secret," Mrs. Blair says, "is in the fact that we have a staff of women speakers of very unusual ability, and that they have been trained with this one end in view. The lessons, too,—we've worked over them and worked over them, to get them not only accurate, but simple, crisp, concise. The class never takes over half an hour and in the printed form you could read the whole four lessons through in less than twenty minutes."

THE COURSE IN VOTING

The first begins with a brief discussion of why one should vote. "The Governor of New York State is a pretty important man, don't you think?" the lesson begins conversationally. "He is the manager of the entire business of the government of this big state with its eleven millions of people. Every law made for New York State has to go to him for his approval, and if it does not seem a good law to him he may veto it. You are going to vote also for your own special representatives at the Legislature in Albany, your State Senator and Assemblyman. It is important for you to choose the right man who is to represent you in that way, because he can make laws for you, both about your work and your home."

The second lesson deals with when and how to vote. Election districts, registration days, the sacred black lead pencil, the mystery of the direct primary, flit by like sign-posts on the road to political progress. The third lesson begins with the Governor, his salary and duties, and goes on down, through Senator and Assemblyman, to details of what to do to each of them if the poor unfortunates don't correctly represent their constituents at Albany. The fourth lesson gets down to the very meat of the thing—"What New York City does for you and what it could do"—from the light that doesn't appear through the airshaft tenement window, through sanitation lacks, and recreation possibilities, to the powers of the mayor and aldermen to deal with the same. The final admonition reads: "Don't forget that you are a voter now,

and that these officials are responsible to you. Because you are a voter—you will be listened to."

One of the most interesting classes took place on the Hippodrome stage for the members of the chorus. These women represented a very large section of the new voting public—foreign-born, or born of foreign parents, yet speaking English and living quite apart from the old-world sentiment of the massed foreign quarters. Such women have intense convictions on the various problems that the Suffrage Party believes will be solved by the new voters. They are eager to learn the machinery of voting—they are vivid, alive, and so full of questions that teaching them is a delight.

"WHO'S WHO AS A VOTER"

"I married an American—at least, he was naturalized—but he, well, he just faded out a coupla years ago," volunteers a vivacious youngster from Hungary in the back row.

"You're a voter, then," Mrs. Blair decrees. "It doesn't matter how long it is since you've seen him. He's your husband still."

The next item of the chorus is blue-eyed and fluffy-headed and most righteously indignant. Adolph ran away, too. But he wasn't naturalized. At least, Marie doesn't think so.

"Then you aren't a voter, and what's more, you can't ever be unless he is," comes the verdict. "A married woman can't take out papers for herself unless she's also a divorced woman."

But the daughter of American parents, by birth or by naturalization before she came of age, is a citizen, and, if she's twenty-one, a voter. Unless indeed she was foolish enough to marry an unnaturalized foreigner. The pitfalls that confront the adjudicator on citizenship are all uncovered in a fat brown pamphlet on "Citizenship and the Vote," so the suffragist speaks with authority. One has to be well up on one's subject to meet all comers—and so many varieties of comers as there are, too.

TEACHING THE NEW IDEA HOW TO VOTE

"But it's fascinating work," Mrs. Blair declared. "I haven't conducted any classes myself except the one at the Hippodrome. My work was in getting out the printed lessons and persuading the employers to take speakers. But all our women loved the classes. One of the speakers had five in one day every week, and in going from the first to the last she covered the five boroughs of the city."

The elections are now almost upon us, and a great many unwise ballots will be cast. But the Woman Suffrage Party is doing its best to see to it that Rachel of Lower Jewry will be at least as intelligent as Abraham who didn't even know that she could vote, and that Josie of the chorus and Mayme of Coatandskirts, to say nothing of those of us whose ancestors came over in the Mayflower or sailed up the harbour with Peter Stuyvesant, will be able to recognize a governor from an assemblyman when confronted by the sacred black lead pencil.

