

PORTLAND, OREGON, SUNDAY MORNING, OCTOBER 13, 1912

WOMEN WHOSE VOTES WILL COUNT FOR PRESIDENT



The Suffragists Who Have the Full Franchise Number Over a Million and a Half and Are Important Election Factors

IF THIS wonderful thing had occurred in course of the long-fought campaign for home rule in Ireland, the noise of it must have echoed throughout civilization. If it had come to England during any portion of the last decade, it would have thrilled the world. It has come to the United States, and only in the places where it is a reality does it seem to be noticed; and there it is accepted as being something so commonplace that nobody can take time to comment on it.

More than a million and a half of women in an English-speaking country are legally entitled to participate in the choice of a nation's executive.

The women are Americans, the nation the United States.

With but little better representation in the British parliament, if as much proportionately, the Irish Nationalists have brought the struggle of years to an issue, with government assurances that the issue shall be favorable. With but a fraction of that footing, England's impassioned suffragists would have found their militant and prejudices, once broken down, with no horrible consequences attendant on the change, purely peaceful, orderly campaigning could have been relied upon to achieve the ultimate goal.

Here, in the face of changes which, fifty years ago, were soberly believed to appear cataclysmal, the sole commentary on it all has been the bare publication of the fact.

And that is the most significant of all the features attending the votes of women in the approaching presidential election.

IT IS doubtful whether the mass of American women themselves realize the enormity of the advance that has come to them—whether even the most sanguine among American suffragists have the full sense of victory which these figures imply.

To the average woman, although the shading of any map of this country for partial as well as full suffrage would cover two-thirds of it, the idea that her sex already holds a balance of power at the polls so far as numbers are usually concerned, appears to have conveyed no practical meaning. Another Socialist in the Reichstag of Germany, a couple of Liberals or Conservatives gained in parliament in Great Britain, and there is almost tumultuous excitement over the political prospects of the future.

But here, with half a dozen American states preparing to vote and several of them reckoning with women as the unknown factor, there is little or no direct appeal for their support except in their own territories; and they themselves take the marvel as coolly as the baking of home bread or the banging of their typewriters.

The very suffragists who are laboring in states where, as yet, nothing has been won, have no crowing to do; the sounds of ambitious strife still echo the arguments of those distant years when Susan B. Anthony and her few devoted allies faced ridicule and sometimes violence. Not even a voice is raised to quote the portentous words of the late Chief Justice, Brewer, "a woman will some day occupy the White House."

So far as sensationalism, popular excitement or even popular interest has gone, the greatest Rubicon of woman's suffrage in the United States is being crossed with scarcely a ripple. It flows along quietly, the election's impressive, if silent, evidence of the familiar dictum that when the women of the United States really want to vote, the right is theirs for the asking.

Every presidential year brings with it the astonishment and the puzzle of the new generation of voters, factors in the millions that are to be reckoned with by campaign managers and predictable only from the averages of former campaigns.

With the new census figures available, the estimate of the Republican national committee for 1912 is that 5,000,000 new voters will be eligible for the ballot. These new voters will include 3,650,000 young men who are coming of age, and they raise the total strength of the male voting population to more than 24,000,000. The 1,850,000 new votes remaining are composed of recently naturalized citizens and of women who this year will, for the first time, exercise the franchise for the presidency. The actual number of women voters, including all who were previously entitled to the ballot and those who come of age this year, is placed at 1,687,000, distributed over the half-dozen states that have exercised their sovereign power to grant the ballot to all.

The figures, if they were translated into forms of men and women voters planned on a scale of comparative size, would show the man looming like a Brobdingnagian above some delicate little fairy from Lilliput. But there have been national elections where fewer popular votes and a smaller representation in the electoral college than they could furnish sufficed to turn the scale.

If there existed any serious apprehension that the woman vote would be cast unanimously for one candidate or another, the whole country would resound with the arguments and appeals directed to those million and more hearers; and woman suffrage for the future might be definitely identified with the fortunes of one political party. But in a fashion wholly different from that which has led the Irish nationalist party in parliament to preserve its independence, the

women voters of this country show no inclination to give allegiance permanently anywhere.

Their political bias, once the leading question of their right to the ballot has been disposed of, has been as diverse as that of the men. They have become citizens first, and partisans afterward as their individual opinions and sentiments have inclined. Factors of immense importance these million and a half of women voters undoubtedly are; but factors of intention precisely as unsure as those of the men they must remain until after November's first week.

The student of this remarkable evolution in

the suffrage movement of the United States must go back to a period when men who are voting now had still to wait many years before their mothers should give them to the nation, back to times when the fathers of many of them were still unborn.

The state of Wyoming almost deserves to be called the mother of suffrage; women are voting there who learned their balloting from mothers who voted before them, and those mothers got their lessons at the polls from this latest generation's pioneer grandmothers. The suffrage is so old a story to the women of Wy-

oming that, so far from picturing it in high heels and a straight front, they think of it only as gray-haired in its experience and almost hoary in its antiquity.

Why, women voted in Wyoming while Wyoming was still, so to speak, attired in short pants. The civil war was over only a few years, the south had not escaped from the anguish of its "reconstruction"; the wild Indians wielded scalping knives on the boundless plains, and Wyoming was a far territory of the United States, not even important enough to claim the privilege of statehood.

From 1869 until 1890 the Wyoming women who confessed to years of 31 or more played their full part, politically, in the making and governing of their unshatched commonwealth, and they played it well, for all the leading-strings of a jealously paternal government held it in long subjection.

Those who analyze the history of the franchise for women in this country find that the real crisis of the movement occurred when bold Wyoming, its constitution providing for the full franchise to the women voters who had been citizens for twenty-one years, staked its admission to statehood on recognition by Congress of that document in its entirety. It meant that, so far as one state could go, every woman over the age of 21 should forever be acknowledged the political equal of man by the congress and the people of the United States. It was the great precedent, which some state must establish unless suffrage were to be a lost cause through all time.

HOW UTAH FOLLOWED SUIT

Wyoming won. Its example was inspiring. For the time the hopeful advocates of the ballot saw its example followed by some of the older commonwealths, too intelligent to long remain shamed by the courage of a western, newly-settled country. But the older states did nothing of the kind; they remained stolid, apathetic, rather derisive. Would there ever be a second?

There was, of all places, Utah, where women was reputed to be nothing but the bond slave and chattel of tyrant man.

Slowly, like Wyoming, but as surely, the lesson of woman's value to the community as a political factor had gained ground; she had been a citizen of Utah while the rest of the United States was applauding the actors who played "The Danites."

Utah for seventeen years had tested the political wisdom of its women in its territorial affairs; and Utah had learned to trust them so implicitly that, when the constitution was being drawn up for admission to statehood, in 1895, the men voters, by an overwhelming majority, elected that their mothers, sisters and wives should continue to enjoy the franchise, up to the full measure in which they themselves possessed it. While the honor of priority must remain with pioneer

(CONTINUED ON INSIDE PAGE)



Respective Sizes of the Male and Female Voters of Millions of Ballot Votes Cast