

Suffs Busy Teaching Girls How to Vote

Classes Held Back Stage and in Stores, Even Tea Rooms Being Invaded to Spread Knowledge

By ELEANOR BOOTH SIMMONS.

WHEN you go to the Hippodrome and gaze upon the sprightly coryphees as they dance, skip, pose, attitudinize, laugh, dimple, sing, swim and dive for your delight you would not suppose just offhand that they were simply panting to exercise the franchise conferred upon them last November and were eager to spend hours of their scant leisure time attending classes to learn how to vote.

But they are.

When you go into a department store and join the bargain rush at the glove counter or the handkerchief counter or pause to renew your wardrobe in the suit atelier you would never dream, would you, that the haughty young lady who sells you things in the pauses of an absorbing conversation with Mamie in the adjoining aisle is talking not of their respective beaux but of the vote and how she didn't go to bed till 12 last night because she got so interested at that class where you learn how to fold your ballot and how to choose the best Congressman.

But she is—at least it's an even chance that she is.

What It Means to Workers.

When you get a letter from the trust company or the title company or some other imposing institution it probably never occurs to you that the efficient young woman who typed it was musing as she hit the keys on the wonderful advantages that are going to accrue to her from the vote and how nice it is of the New York City Woman Suffrage party to show her how to use that vote.

But she is; ten to one she is. Ask Mrs. John Blair.

Mrs. Blair is the capable assistant of Boss Mary Garrett Hay in the task the N. Y. C. W. S. P. has undertaken of teaching New York women how to vote. Now, man, I have found, is inclined to be scornful about the suffs starting classes to show women the P's and Q's of this new job of voting. I've had men say to me, sitting back in their chairs with that look, about half bored and half amused:

"What is this notion about teaching women to vote? What do the suffs mean, teaching women to vote? You don't have to learn to vote. Anybody can vote. I didn't have to learn to vote. You just go into a booth and mark your ballot—"

Remember the Spoiled Ballots.

And then you sit down and remind those superior men about the number of spoiled ballots in every election and beg them to remember that voting isn't just casting a ballot, but is knowing about candidates and parties and politics and issues, and in conclusion you inquire of them how many men, even men, vote really wisely, use their ballots to the very best advantage. But it's no use. They just laugh and say:

"Oh, well, any woman with any sense—"

Probably that is the point. A good many of us haven't much sense. As George Eliot's Mrs. Poyser remarked in this respect, God Almighty made us to match the men. Real political, civic, patriotic sense one is not dowered with at birth as completely as some believers in democracy suppose. So Boss Hay and the rest of the suffs think it won't do women or men either any harm to attend classes in government and voting.

The suffs have had them at suff headquarters all over the city, and now they are having them in the department stores and the offices of corporations where women are employed and also at the Hippodrome. And the girls are just eating 'em up. I went to the class at the Hip and I know.

The 400 chorus girls who add so much to the attractiveness of this big amusement place were told to report on the stage at 12:30 sharp. They were not told what for. The management and Mrs. Blair thought they might shy at the proposition if they knew what it was.

That shows that the Hip management



Mrs. John Blair, suffragist, instructing Hippodrome chorus on how and why to vote.

and Mrs. Blair don't know the coryphees. Far from shying they cantered right up to Mrs. Blair and drank down her preliminary remarks on voting as if it had been hints on "How to Get a Raise in Salary." But then Mrs. Blair, who knows a thing or two, adroitly hinted that the way to secure material advancement was to learn politics and stand together and work together for what they wanted.

"You know how it is here in the Hippodrome," she said. "If one of you girls has a grievance or wants some change in the conditions you'd stand a poor chance, just one of you, of being heard. But if you all got together and presented your side you'd win a hearing. It is just like that about voting."

"My Gawd, that's so," murmured an angel faced child in a demure Quaker gray crepe frock and a gray bonnet with pink roses. I heard afterward that she had been married and was supporting her two babies. But they all preface remarks with "My Gawd." It doesn't mean anything. It's just like the children who begin every sentence with "Say, listen." The Hip girls are children in a way.

Well, as I said, they took to Mrs. Blair. Mr. Burnside and Mr. Lucia, who manage the Hippodrome between them, one the back of it out to the footlights and one of them the front of it in to the footlights—well, both said it was Mrs. Blair's hat.

"It's an argument that sure will appeal to those girls," said Mr. Burnside, gazing with admiration at the smart and fetching creation tilted at just the right angle on Mrs. Blair's smooth brown head. With the tact that always distinguishes her the professor of voting had purchased a new hat for this occasion, and it certainly did perform its mission of riveting the eyes of 400 coryphees.

Every Nation Represented.

A varied and interesting lot, these chorus girls. Every nationality on earth almost was there, Spanish, French, English, Danish, everything, and some of them extremely pretty. As the press agent said, even the Winter Garden hasn't got handsomer girls than some at the Hip—but this isn't a press agent story, this is a story about how anxious the Hip girls are to learn to vote.

Having captured their attention with her hat Mrs. Blair proceeded to hold it by means of her tongue. She said afterward that she was frightened to death. How was she to know what to say to girls she had only met across the footlights, girls attired in spangled tights, diving from a high wire into an artificial lake—or something like that?

Her feminine instinct told her a new hat was a safe play with any woman, but as to what arguments to use she didn't know. But she went at it.

She told them first that New York women would be before the world next fall, that if the headlines in the newspapers said the day after election that "few women care to vote" all the world would know that the women of New York weren't interested in the Government and didn't care how things were run.

That appealed to them. A coryphee in a red hat who had been looking sort of droopy, as if she didn't relish being yanked out of bed and losing her morning beauty sleep to hear a suff talk, straightened up and gave the red hat an arrogant tilt.

"Gee, May, if they're goin' to think that we'll show 'em," she muttered to her neighbor.

Then Mrs. Blair told them how they could send a Congressman to Washington, how each girl could have a Congressman of her own whom her vote had helped to elect. That roused a sort of proprietary ambition in them, and you could see a sort of acquisitive gleam in the eyes of several coryphees as they laid their plans to acquire a Congressman.

How It Affects Workers.

With a few simple and well chosen remarks on what women could do with the vote to better the conditions of working women Mrs. Blair finished, because there was an afternoon performance at the Hip and the girls had to have coffee before the curtain went up. The majority of them plunged for the coffee, but a few earnest souls gathered around Mrs. Blair to ask questions.

The chief difficulty with many, it appeared, was that they had husbands who weren't Americans. And it was a great surprise to them when Mrs. Blair told them that a woman took her husband's nationality.

"Do you mean," demanded a big handsome blonde, "that just because my husband's Spanish and never got his papers I can't vote, and me born right here in Noo York?"

"Persuade your husband to get naturalized," advised Mrs. Blair.

The blonde's paw dropped.

"I don't know where he is," she wailed. "He's gone and skipped and took my vote with him!"

When last seen the prompter or cue boy or stage manager or something was yelling for the blonde to get into her costume and she paid no attention because she and the sparkling black eyed French wife of a missing Dane were laying plans to organize a search expedition for their votes which the recalcitrant husbands had robbed them of. But Mrs. Blair had to go off to a department store class, so she couldn't stay to see what happened.

Department store heads were a trifle skittish at first when Mrs. Blair approached them on the question of having classes in voting for their women employees in store hours. It was a new departure. Most of them have schools where salesmanship and arithmetic and so on are taught those employees who need teaching; but voting—what has voting to do with selling cloaks and hats and ribbons?

In one case it was argued that it had been the policy of the store never to interfere with the employees or to try to force them to do this or that. If they wanted a class in voting, well and good, they were welcome to have it.

Most of the other stores, after demurring that it might do harm to intro-

duce politics, capitulated to Mrs. Blair. That lady's plea was on the score of efficiency. Anything that helped to sharpen the wits of the force would make them more valuable to the store, and nothing was so enlarging to the mind as the serious study of politics, argued Mrs. Blair. And one by one the department stores went down before Mrs. Blair like nine-pins, till now the store that hasn't a class in voting for its women is the exception.

The next trench Mrs. Blair took was the tea rooms of New York. She gets up very early to go to the tea rooms before the afternoon rush for tea and cake and so on begins, and she has the advantage of talking to the waitresses while they are still fresh and before their feet begin to ache. Also she has put up fifty posters advertising the educational work of the party—put them up in tea rooms.

The women of the Bankers Trust Company nearly swamped the suff headquarters on East Thirty-eighth street when they were invited to a class there. Mrs. Blair arranged a cosy little meeting in the lecture room upstairs, a room holding about one hundred. Then her troubles began. One hundred and seventy-five young women from the company demanded tickets the first day, and when Mrs. Blair confessed that the suffs, being terribly busy, hadn't gone to the trouble of having tickets printed, but told women just to come and all would be well, Miss Lucy K. Powell, who describes herself as intermediary between the administration and the employees, was quite discouraged with the suffs.

Her Faith Was Shaken.

She was arranging the matter for the Bankers Trust Company, and had been quite taken with the idea of classes in voting, but it was evident that her faith was shaken by the discovery that the suffs would have a meeting without tickets. She informed Mrs. Blair, gently but firmly, over the telephone, that there must be tickets. It is evident that not only the young women at the Bankers Trust Company but the suffs as well are going to be jacked up by this cooperation between Mrs. Blair and Miss Powell.

The meeting for the trust company girls was a great success. It was held at the suff headquarters, and nearly two hundred came from the Bankers Trust Company, and fifty desk workers from the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, and forty from the Charity Organization Society, and so on. Mrs. Blair now has no doubts about whether girl workers want to learn to vote; her only care is to secure speakers and teachers for the classes.

If you should chance to be a speaker at any meeting or luncheon or dinner, and you see a pretty woman in a new hat—straw with a smart trimming of wheat heads—lurking in the background and taking you in with an appraising eye, that is probably Mrs. Blair and she is probably weighing your gifts, considering whether you would do for a speaker at one of her voting schools. And if she makes up her mind to snare you, you are lost.