

HOW WOMAN GOES TO VOTE

Her Ways at Polling Places, as Observed in the Recent Registration Lines

By HILDA D. JACKSON.

WHERE is all the election-time atmosphere of yesteryear? Where are the registration booths, the polling places blue with smoke? And where the puffy "ward heeler" with his ever-present seegar?

"It ain't like it used to be," intoned the veteran policeman on guard during the recent registration. He stood braced against a post in the centre of a large basement playground of a school on the lower east side—P. S. 63, which covers the whole block between Third and Fourth Streets and First and Second Avenues. It is the neighborhood which bred "Lefty Louie," "Gyp the Blood" and others of their ilk, a region which was a veritable battleground during election periods in past years.

But now—

An ambitious infant clung to the policeman's right leg and gazed speculatively up the towering expanse of official blue trouser. Over to the left, a long line of men and women waited patiently, even cheerily, their turn to register. Over to the right, the same scene. And all around children romped.

There was a deal of chatting, greeting of friends, exchange of pleasantries, and gossip. The place was decorated with large signs announcing "No Smoking." Plenty of air, plenty of space. In fact, registration week on the lower east side might have been an Old Home

Week for each district—a community party.

"And no trouble, never no trouble any more," the Veteran regretted. "In the old days we could always run in a couple of guys, there was always rows. There's nothing doing any more. Since the women's been mixing in, politics ain't the same."

He was talking to Dr. Katharine B. Davis, ex-Commissioner of Correction of New York City. As Vice President of the Honest Ballot Association, Dr. Davis, in company with several other members, was spending an evening visiting the registration booths.

Although the object of the tour was an investigation of the foreign-born woman's attitude toward her new privilege, the evident change in the atmosphere of the registration places was strikingly evident.

Most of the booths were in school buildings. Often two districts had their headquarters at the opposite ends of the same school basement, as in the case of Public School 63. The proceeding everywhere had a most domestic flavor.

Parenthetically it may be recorded that not a bit of profanity did Dr. Davis's party hear all evening, and in only one place did they see an election official smoking.

"And he's an old man—been with the party for years," an official hastened to explain.

As was to be expected the tour showed that in the case of the foreign-born woman the expansion of the suffrage had

raised questions as to the adequacy of the present election laws.

The Honest Ballot Association is conducting an investigation of the matter from every angle. Its watchers at all registration places were instructed to pay particular attention to the new voting element. The registration passed off smoothly enough, but there may be a different story on Election Day, Nov. 2.—The officials, if they so desire, may challenge the foreign-born woman voter and require her to produce almost impossible proofs. Not one woman in a thousand would be able to give the inspectors satisfactory proof of the legality of her marriage, or of her place of residence for the past five years. Yet, according to the law, this may be required.

Watchers were stationed by the association at the booths during registration week. They were interviewed by Dr. Davis in the course of her trip of inspection. The reports from all registration places visited were remarkable for their similarity and disclosed significant facts. The general proportion of women out of the total who registered in the lower east side was about 33 1-3 per cent. Of these, fewer than 1 per cent. were American-born girls of foreign parentage—the first voters. American-born girls of the east side showed a disregard of their new privilege. The women who did register were, almost without exception, the older women—the women brought by their husbands. Each registered under the eye of her husband on his citizenship papers. In many cases, according to the watchers, the women could neither read nor write English. Some couldn't speak English, but could understand enough to indicate the answers.

At P. S. 79, in First Street, an Italian section, out of forty women who registered, six could not read or write in any language; five were American born and the rest neither spoke nor wrote English. Ninety out of 380 who registered at P. S. 13, in East Houston Street, a strong Socialist district, were women, four-fifths of whom were unable to speak English.

"The proportion here has been about sixteen women out of a total of fifty registrants," the watcher said. "Every one came with her husband and registered on his papers."