

WHY SUFFRAGE FIGHT TOOK 50 YEARS

Leader Tells of Hindenburg Line of Germans Broken in West, Gives Political Sidelights, and Finds Causes for Victory's Delay

By CARRIE CHAPMAN CATT

THE passage of the Federal suffrage amendment by the United States Congress on June 4 should be credited to no man or woman, nor group of men or women, nor to any one political party. It should be credited to no particular method or form of campaign, nor even to our own generation. Any attempt so to limit the credit betokens crass ignorance of American and world history. The passage of the amendment is the result of fifty years or more of concerted, never-ceasing effort.

Some pronounce it evolution. True, it is evolution. But behind the evolution there have been evolvers—hundreds, thousands of them, who, in order to push the demand for woman suffrage forward, gave every possibility of their lives to the cause. All that they had and all that they were went to the service of woman's emancipation. Although women were the chief workers, there have been men who, like the women, lived in strictest economy so that there should be more to give to the woman's cause. A long array of such noble souls rises in memory as one looks backward over the years; women who had the vision of the righteousness of the equality of rights between the sexes, men who dare to espouse a despised cause.

The victory at Washington is, therefore, no sudden development, no unexpected event. On the contrary, it is a long-overdue climax.

The Federal suffrage amendment was introduced in Congress in 1878, forty years ago, by the National Woman Suffrage Association, and has been pending ever since, each new session witnessing its early introduction, while with weary watching and working the years have succeeded each other.

The Constitution of the United States is not an easy instrument to change, but it has been amended three times between 1878 and 1919. Had the Federal suffrage amendment been passed and ratified when it was first introduced, it would have been the Sixteenth Amendment. As its case stands it will be the Nineteenth when ratified, amendments that provide for an income tax, the direct election of Senators, and prohibition having successively displaced it.

The impatient, uninformed newcomer into the movement has justifiably failed to understand the delay. One not closely acquainted with the entire history of the movement, and especially our political psychology, could not do otherwise.

The delay has been due to four main causes, all others being subsidiary.

(1) In the beginning of the movement the entire world, including women, believed confidently that women were mentally, physically, morally, spiritually, inferior to men, with minds incapable of education, capacities too rudimentary to permit of their even looking after their own property, bodies too feeble to perform the simplest tasks for which men earned wages.

(2) The illiterate, undeveloped man held the view of the cave man that the woman belonged to him to do with as he pleased. She existed for him to dominate. In the refined, educated man this primitive instinct developed into a chivalrous, high-minded spirit of protection. Between these extremes the views of men toward women ranged all the possibilities.

The very suggestion that woman should control her own property served as a reflection upon man's honesty or ability to do it for her.

For a woman to want education implied that man was incapable of doing the necessary thinking for the females of his family.

To propose that women should speak in public implied that they had ideas which could not be expressed by their natural protectors.

To ask for a vote was equivalent to declaring the government of men a failure, because it connoted that a dependent class was so dissatisfied with it as to demand a share in remaking it.

Of all obstacles the primitive prejudices and resentments involved in these various implications have been the most difficult to overcome.

(3) The third cause belongs in the realm of "pure politics." The form of our Constitutions, Federal and State, is such that it is necessary that the members of a Legislature or Congress voting to submit an amendment which aims to enfranchise a class are obliged to pass the amendment on to the electors before the class to be enfranchised has



Mrs. Maud Wood Park,
Chairman of the Congressional Committee of the National American Woman Suffrage Association.



Mrs. Helen Gardener of Washington,
"The Diplomat of the Suffrage Service,"
Who Negotiated Many a Difficult Impasse, Arranged Appointments and Special Conferences, and Got Statements and Interviews.

received its vote. Legislators are deprived thus of the support of grateful voters, newly enfranchised, while forced to meet the condemnation of that part of the existing electorate which does not approve an extension of the suffrage. An intimate account of the history of suffrage legislation reveals the fact that this has probably been the most prolific source of delay.

(4) An iniquitous system, sometimes



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and a slow period of education and organization was ushered in.

It is a well-known psychological fact that every great war has been followed by a period of liberality, succeeded soon by one of tremendous reaction. Our own country was no exception to the rule, and the years between 1880 and 1895 gave small hospitality to any proposal of change in our institutions. Meanwhile the leaders of the movement learned two lessons and learned them well. Many men in Congress would never vote for the enactment of any law merely because it appealed to them as right, just, or for the benefit of the future of the country. Ours is a representative Government, and legislators do not forget their constituencies at home who may not agree as to the importance of such legislation. It was clear that popular sentiment behind Congressmen was necessary before it would be possible to secure the suffrage by the Federal route. The National Suffrage Association had been organized in 1869 for the express purpose of concentrating on the effort to secure suffrage by Federal amendment. Yet the workers of that early day were promptly confronted with the fact that their demands on Congressmen rebounded as from a blank wall.

Those demands were not backed by votes.

There was, therefore, nothing for it but to get some votes, and thereupon was projected the supplementary plan of State campaigns until enough States should have been won to make the voting contingent back of the demand for the Federal suffrage amendment too considerable to be overlooked. It has been sometimes said that the National Suffrage Association has worked for suffrage only by State referenda. I wish especially to stress the order of the National's program:

First—It was organized to work for a Federal suffrage amendment.

Second—It supplemented and strengthened

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ened that work by the winning of States to suffrage, full and Presidential.

Third—It massed the voting strength of fifteen and a half million women over voting age behind the demand for the amendment.

In all, fifteen States have been won to full suffrage, two to primary suffrage, and the Legislatures of twelve States have conferred on women the right to vote for the next President of the United States. Only a small part of this great harvest was reaped during what we may call the "educational period"—the thirty years which lie between 1880 and 1910. That was a seed-sowing time, and it is the most uninteresting, uneventful, and unpicturesque portion of the suffrage movement.

The greatest educator in the removal of prejudice proved to be woman suffrage in operation. Although the whole world scorned the little pioneer border settlement of Wyoming in its brave endeavor to do justice to women, it nevertheless carried a greater influence than it is now possible to measure. Year after year the women voted. The testimony continued that they voted wisely and well; that they were independent; that they were high-minded and recognized the necessity of continued improvement in political methods.

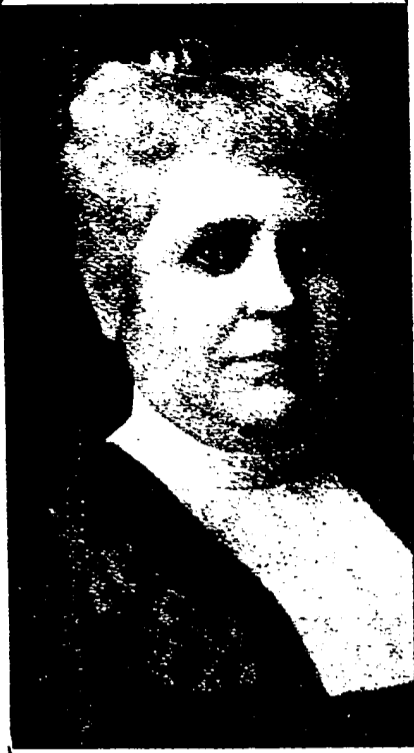
Wyoming people moved over into the adjoining States, and by and by the leaven of their influence so strengthened the popular belief that when the question was submitted the campaigners found a reception to their views not known elsewhere. From Wyoming as a centre, woman suffrage spread over the great West, but met a von Hindenburg line stretching from the Canadian border to the southland through North and South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, and Oklahoma.

That Hindenburg line was composed of German citizens who had removed to Russia to escape conscription some 230 years ago. They were illiterate when they migrated to Russia, and there were no educational facilities in the home of their adoption. Two hundred years later Russia began to conscript her men, and the entire colony removed to the United States, finding homes and free lands in the great West. In all of these States men voted on their first papers, and it was always an easy matter with a little money to control any election through these illiterate voters. That was repeatedly done in all of those States, and woman suffrage in its march eastward was effectually checked for some years.

In few instances did any political party strong enough to hope for State control indorse woman suffrage in its platform or lend its political machinery to the carrying of the suffrage amendment at the polls. On the contrary, these political parties as a usual thing lent their machinery to the opponents. The opposition was not, as is ordinarily supposed, the little group of women who do not wish to vote themselves, and who have so poor an opinion of their sex that they contend that the entire sex is too inferior to have a share in politics; instead, it has been, and is, great interests which believe they have something to lose through the enfranchisement of women.

The most hostile and effective opponent of woman suffrage has been the liquor interests of the country. The National American Woman Suffrage Association, which for fifty years has moved forward consistently under its one banner of "Political Equality for Women," has never expressed an official opinion on this question. As an organization it has never worked for or against prohibition. Nevertheless, the liquor dealers reasoned that, since women were not the manufacturers of liquor or the consumers of liquor, but were the greatest sufferers from its evils, a larger proportionate number could be depended upon to vote for prohibition than men.

Other corporations representing great



E. F. Foley.

Miss Mary Garrett Hay, Chairman of the Woman Suffrage Party of New York City and Member of the Congressional Committee, Who Was a Leading Asset in the Last Laps of the Campaign for the Federal Amendment.

interests have been known to contribute and to lend their mighty influences to the defeat of woman suffrage. Twenty-odd years ago we knew that the woman suffrage cause was won, so far as the masses of intelligent people of the country were concerned, and that our struggle had narrowed down to securing the co-operation and the indorsement of the political parties. How to meet that responsibility has been a problem much discussed, and the discussion has never resulted in but a single answer. In the long run, popular sentiment controls in this country. Votes may be bought and evil influences may round up such voters to defeat a question now and then, but in the long run sentiment will not tolerate that sort of thing. Our business, therefore, has been to arouse popular sentiment, to tell the real truth to the people, wherever there were ears to hear or eyes to read.

The next task has been so to direct that popular sentiment as to make political parties realize that even the largest contributors to a political party are

not so important in elections as the support of the masses of the people. In the long run, men in control of the machines of political parties want their work to be clean and their parties to be honest. The only real thrill of political excitement is found in an honest controversy, honestly fought through campaigns and the opinions honestly recorded at the polls. There is no gratification in a game where the dice have been loaded. Therefore, politicians when convinced that popular sentiment will support them have been glad enough to rise in response to the popular will, even though financial interests still oppose.

How has final success been accomplished?

The National American Woman Suffrage Association has had a hearing before every Resolutions Committee of all dominant political parties for the last twenty years. It has circularized and interviewed the delegates to political conventions for the same number of years. It has never failed in every succeeding Congress to introduce the Federal suffrage amendment, to follow it up by a hearing before the committees to which it had been referred in House and Senate, and to interview members of both houses as to the possibility of its passage.

From its National Headquarters it has not only reached out to Washington, but through its auxiliaries has conducted the same kind of work with the political parties and the Legislatures of every State in the Union. It has circularized and interviewed State, County, and Town Committees of political parties. It has organized in the precincts of every town, city, and county in the country a constituency of women who wish to vote, and who make it known at home.

For years we have card-indexed men, both in our National and our State work. "Yellow card men," and "blue card men," and "white card men" have enlivened our file-boxes and colored our conversation for, lo, this last quarter of a century. The man "all right on suffrage" is a yellow card man; the white card man is doubtful or possible; the blue card man is unchangeably opposed. The process of changing blue, first into white, then into yellow, has presented points of vivid interest.

It was early discovered that when a Congressman or Senator told every woman who interviewed him that he was opposed for a certain reason and stated the same reason to all, it was really his opinion. An effort was then made to bring him proof of his error, and every legitimate means of bringing the proof needed for his conversion was employed. When, however, the Senator gave to

each woman who interviewed him a different reason for his opposition, it was then understood that his opposition was not a considered opposition. One by one the objections he urged were combated, both by interview and literature at Washington and by the people he knew at home. Every effort was put forth to learn the names and the interests which gave financial backing to the Congressman or legislator, and these interests were then appealed to join their request with ours that the candidate should vote for woman suffrage.

In this manner we have learned some strange things. One is that even despite the campaign against corruption and on behalf of real democratic representative government, there are men elected to legislative positions who are utterly controlled, not by the voters who elected them, but by the man who contributed the money to pay the bills for their campaign. No influence known has been found to overcome this power in politics.

The National American Woman Suffrage Association has proceeded upon the supposition that men were honest, reasonable, and patriotic. It has supposed that men in the Legislatures and in Congress would possess at least a common school education, some knowledge of history, and some realizing sense of the place occupied by our own nation among the world's nations. It is glad to report that the majority of legislators and Congressmen belong to these classes, and that when reasonable appeals have been made to them they have listened and acted accordingly. Many have been slow to move, but they have moved. We are pained to confess that we have known a minority in many a Legislature and in Congress which is not honest, reasonable, or patriotic, which does not show any signs of knowledge of history or geography.

Interviews and records have always been regarded as confidential and will be so conserved. They would furnish interesting matter for the student of psychology, of politics, and of democracy in operation.

What of ratification? Can opponents hold thirteen States and thus defeat ratification? Impossible. There is no power of men or armies that can stay the coming of an idea when its time to move has come. The States will ratify. Political parties have risen above the influences which once stayed their support. They have pledged it and are sincere and serious now. A minority of slow-brained, timid ones still show an energetic amount of hostility toward woman suffrage, but their opposition only offers the invariable hazards which all great movements have met—and conquered.