

The Woman Voter

EARLY HISTORY OF THE MEN'S LEAGUE

BY

MAX EASTMAN

HISTORY is a formal sounding word, but the **Men's League** consisted for so long of myself and a newspaper-notice that I can only write of its beginnings in the first person. The newspaper-notice deserves more of the credit for its formation than I do. It was a notice in the *Herald* to the effect that I had said I was going to form such a **league**. And that statement simply followed me around, and nagged, and bullied me until I couldn't stand it. I had to make good. When you have a painful duty to perform, just make a public statement that you are going to perform it. Pride will carry you through.

Our **league** was not the first of its kind, but it thought it was, so it had all the glammers of an historic beginning. It even had a disputed origin. For while I thought my indiscretion before that *Herald* reporter was the authentic fountain source, I learned later that Mr. Oswald Villard had on his desk a letter from Miss Shaw suggesting that he organize a **Men's League**, and that he had consulted Rabbi Wise, and they had agreed to share the ignominy, provided someone turned up who would do the work. From their point of view therefore, I suppose I merely turned up; but from mine, coming with that newspaper-notice on my back, I was more or less of a **league** before I ever saw them.

Rabbi Wise discouraged me. He was too enthusiastic. I could see at a glance that I couldn't hold his pace as a reformer. So I went down to Mr. Villard. He dwelt more upon the ease than the glory of the task, and I felt better. He gave me cards of introduction to twelve men in New York—men of "civic importance" as I afterward informed the public, though I had never heard of them at the time. He also gave me two dollars as dues to the **league**. This was by no means the only contribution he made, but it was the most effective. That two dollars sealed my responsibility. It weighed me down even heavier than the newspaper clipping. I was the organizer now for certain. I held the funds. There was nothing to do but go ahead and organize.

The first man I called on was Hector S. Tyndale. He received me volubly, said he believed in **woman suffrage**, but he didn't want to join a **men's league**. The truth was he believed in **suffrage** so much—so profoundly—with him it was a kind of religion—that he'd be damned if he'd see it made ridiculous! That was a severe blow. I didn't go to see another of these civic wonders for about two weeks.

When I did, however, I had better luck. I was informed by him that his wife was an anti-suffragist, and that his reason for being a suffragist was that he thought women ought to try to be more intelligent than they are, if only for the sake of their husbands. I expressed my sympathy, told him that although not yet an actual husband my motive was substantially the same, and he joined the **league**. All the other twelve men joined it. Charles C. Burlingham joined it with a **humorous** amusement that put the organization forward as far as Mr. Tyndale's religious fervor had put it back.

After those twelve men of civic importance—I was always on the verge of calling it civic righteousness but had been warned against that—were corralled, the rest was comparatively easy.

I wrote a circular letter containing their names with a statement of what the **league** was to be, and sent it to some four or five hundred more civic gentlemen whose names I had collected in the mean time as being persons open to reason. The reasoning with which I appealed to them was brief, however. It consisted in the main of two assurances, the importance of which I had learned in my visits to the original twelve. One was that no public announcement of the existence of the **league** would be made, until we had a hundred prominent men on our list. The other was that no member would be called upon to do anything. The main function of the **league** would be to exist.

With these two assurances and my twelve magic names, I appealed through the mail to all the men in the state that I had ever heard of, in connection with any matter remotely related to the progress of civilization. It took me five months and about five thousand stamps to capture a hundred of them. By rare good fortune, however, and with the help of Mr. Villard, I captured George Foster Peabody among the first, and his generosity made the rest possible. The **league** owes its pecuniary life to him, and it owes to him a great part of its early standing before the public. It also owes much to the help and counsel of John Dewey and Oswald Garrison Villard.

Our plan was to keep these first activities private, and when we came before the public to come with a large and sudden explosion. It was not a happy day, therefore, when a *Times* reporter got hold of one of my letters, and called me up asking for a few more details. After a consultation with my backers, I decided to give him all the names we had—twenty-five at that time. So we went off under a small charge of powder after all. Still, there was enough force in those names to give us a headline on the front page, and a very delicate handling by the reporter. He satisfied his sense of humor by making public the fact that the **league** would not be made public until it had a hundred members, and that it now had only twenty-five,—moreover, "there was one peculiar thing about the **league** as stated in its prospectus, and that was that it was not going to do anything!"

The afternoon of the day this appeared, one of the most precious and most civic of my twenty-five—a prominent physician of New York—sent in a brief but quite intelligible resignation, and the sky looked very dark around the executive office for some time. It needn't have, for the civic physician has since graciously rejoined the **league**, and the leakage of these twenty-five names never did any other damage. The truth is, it took us so long to get the other seventy-five, that by the time we had them, this *Times* item had been forgotten by the public, and the **league** went off with as generous an explosion as we could have asked.

We met at the City Club on an afternoon of November, 1910. A sheet of press-material as to the nature and prospects of the **league**, as well as the principal events of the meeting and a list of the officers there elected, was prepared beforehand. *The press was not admitted*. It was told about the meeting afterward. And how

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many of those dignitaries elected to office were actually present to participate in their own election, it never knew. Nor shall I here divulge any of these diplomatic secrets. Suffice it to say that some fifty of the biggest and best men of New York appear to have met at the City Club and organized themselves into a **league for woman suffrage**, the newspapers of New York City and State were full of their pictures, interviews with them, statements that they meant business and that many thousands of dollars were behind the movement. Well, they were—a glance at the names would prove that—and if they have stayed behind, it has not been the fault of the executive committee.

I give these facts as they were, because they may serve as advice to those who are forming leagues in other states. The formation of a **league** is neither an exciting nor inspiring affair, but it can appear so if properly handled, and viewed from behind closed doors by the press.

The subsequent history of the **league** may be inspiring indeed, but the press will never think so. When we gave a public dinner at the Aldine Club and six hundred people came and paid three dollars and stayed until midnight, to hear our dignitaries explain the glories of the **Men's Movement**, it was truly inspiring. When we filled Cooper Union to the doors, with Governor Brady of Idaho and a list of Honorable male citizens to back him up on the platform, and an audience largely composed of men who cheered votes **for** women far into the night, it was still more inspiring. I can say without divulging any secrets that it was a good deal more inspiring than that first meeting at the City Club. But the press couldn't see it. Even when we occupied five blocks, four abreast, marching solid in the **suffrage** parade last May, the press could see only a grudging thousand of us.

So my advice to organizers of other leagues whose first service is to secure their own publicity, is this—make the most of your beginning. You never can begin but once.

Now and in the future, however, the **Men's League** of New York has other services to perform. The day of big headlines and heroics **for** the men who believe in **woman suffrage** is past. I believe the **league** has hastened its passing. But its functions in the future will be greater. Equal **suffrage** is a practical issue on the political field, and the **Men's League** is in the fight **for** it there. Under the active management of Mr. Laidlaw, the chairman of the executive committee, and Mr. Beadle, whose installation in the executive office was one of my best services as secretary—under the management of these two, with many others ready to serve when and where they can, the **league** will take a big place in the two or three years' campaign that is ahead of us. It will not lie down until it has abolished that political privilege which made its own separate existence necessary.

majority of 87,455.

But mark these facts:

(1) The **woman suffrage** amendment received the largest vote of all the forty-two amendments.

(2) More men voted **for woman suffrage** in Ohio than have ever before voted on the question (pro *and* con) in any other state in which the question has been submitted to vote.

Let our enemies take such comfort as they may from these facts!

If we had had three months more in which to work, that is, if we had had a six months' instead of a three months' campaign, we should have carried.

At a conference to be held in Cleveland, September 30th, Ohio suffragists will decide upon the working details of the new campaign. We shall proceed under the new Initiative and Referendum law and bring our question before the voters in due season through an initiative petition.

ELIZABETH J. HAUSER.

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At the special election in Ohio, September 3rd, 249,420 men voted "yes" on women **suffrage**.