

# STORY OF THAT SUFFRAGE FLOAT

How Feminine Inventive-ness Overcame Difficulties.

## AND THEY MADE A HIT

Some Personal Recollections and Observations of the Twentieth of May Parade.

(BY VICTOR L. STEPHENSON.)

One of the most beautiful floats in the Twentieth of May parade in Charlotte last Spring was that representing the Equal Suffrage League of Charlotte.

Its beauty was two-fold: the artistry and taste shown in the manner of its ornamentation and the personae of the young women who rode thereon.

It is perfectly proper to make a generalization like that for the reason that this article is being written by a masculine person, who had no part or parcel in the parade. The reference to the attractive personae would certainly have been deleted by the censors of the special suffrage edition had not its author by a subterfuge secured its publication, for the officers, and hence the censors, were passengers on the float.

After all, why should not one be allowed to state undisputed facts in a pellucid manner? It is true that many suffragists abhor the use of feminine charms to win adherents to the cause, and would therefore bar all remarks upon the subject, but facts are facts.

And it is certainly a fact that as that suffrage float wended its way between the long lines of applauding people as it followed the itinerary of the parade, many a man after man turned to his neighbor and enthusiastically exclaimed, "They can have my vote!"

There was a note of distinct astonishment in their tones. They knew little about "suffragettes" except what they had read in the dispatches from London, or had gained from the sketches and caricatures in unfriendly comic papers. Seemingly they must have pictured the advocates of votes for women as unnatural creatures, mannish in appearance, each wielding a bludgeon, "carrying a big stick" but neglecting to "speak softly." But the radiant vision of Southern young women, as fine as the South's civilization has been able to produce, (fortunate those censors didn't see this) came as a revelation of the real significance of the suffrage movement. Never again could their attitude toward it be the same.

The manner in which the suffragists presented their appeal for the ballot could scarcely have been more happy. To get the picture clearly in mind, know that the float was drawn by a milk-white charger. The reins were held by an obscure Ethiopian in the character of an Afro-American chauffeur. On the sides of the float in imperious capitals appeared the principle, "Votes for Women." Riding on the float were seven young women in white, officers and members of the league. At the front and at the rear of the equipage, large handsome league banners were flung to the breeze. One of the occupants sat at a table with a scroll in her hand. As the float rolled across the sacred jubilee in Independence Square she dipped her pen into the ink and wrote. And then the world saw what had occurred, for there was displayed a pennant with the inscription, "Signing the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence of May 20, 1914."

A success? I should say so! The suffragist cause thrives on publicity, and it was one of the features of a crowded day. Thousands who had ignored the subject discussed it that night. And as for its artistic standing, did you know that it was seriously considered by the judges for the third prize among all the contestants in that elaborate and brilliant procession?

Whither, you may ask, came the funds for this adventure? You shall have your answer, and when you have it never dare deny again that woman suffrage will be a force making for economy and against reckless and wasteful expenditures of the public money.

A few days before the parade a committee of two consulted one with another, for the leary, limited though its financial resources, simply must be represented.

"For what amount can a horse and wagon be secured for use on May 20?" was asked of one who should know.

"Fifty dollars would be a moderate price," was the reply. "All the horses in the whole region will be engaged in advance."

The suffragists were not daunted. They had ideas of their own. They went forth to look over the field. Ere long they espied on South Church street a dray wagon drawn by a white horse. Instantly the outfit was halted. Inquiry was made for a quotation of a price for the



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use of the horse and wagon until 2 o'clock on May 20, with the privilege of decorating the wagon on the night previous. The ducky meditated and then said, modestly, "About two dollars on a half, I reckon."

The bargain was struck without further parleying and the colored man grinned proudly at the thought of participating in the great parade.

On the night before the Twentieth, the same being the Night of the Nineteenth, there was a mobilization of suffragists, on East avenue where the humble wagon under the touch

of skilled fingers, underwent a transformation into an attractive float which on the morrow was to meet and win the critical gaze of the multitudes.

And what was the total cost of the material which went into the ornamentation of the first suffrage float ever shown in North Carolina, together with the cost of securing it and exhibiting it?

The float of the city of Charlotte cost \$350.

That of the Suffrage League cost less than \$10.

Wherefore, Votes for Women!

