

Work of Women in Municipal Affairs.*

BY LILLIAN D. WALD,

The Nurses' Settlement, New York City.

SUCH data as I have, I collected at the Settlement dinner table, and, of course, I cannot, in this short address, do more than touch upon the subject. I was not quite clear in my mind whether I was to have the compliment of being asked to suggest what women could do in municipal affairs, or to report what they have done. The greater number of things which they have accomplished have, of course, been done in association with men.

There is one association, called the Health Protective Association, that has succeeded in establishing quite a number of sanitary reforms. It was started by some women who lived on — Hill, having a charming view of the river, but the best citizens were being driven away by the foul odour from the abattoirs in the neighbourhood. One day, in 1884, eleven women came together, and decided to organize for the protection of the view, and to improve the air by removing accumulations of manure which were piled up in the vicinity, and the next day they organized with fifteen members, and incorporated the organization. They went to work intelligently. They went up to Albany, and a Bill was introduced which made it a misdemeanour to have such accumulations within the city limits. They succeeded in having the manure removed, though the man who owned it had a brother there who had the "biggest kind of pull." When the butchers and other people who were using the city for that purpose discovered how costly it would be to defeat the Bill, they accepted the reform. Mrs. Trautman is to be credited with much of the good work that association has accomplished. Since then they have abolished a great many nuisances arising from gas houses in the city, and it is largely through their efforts that the signs have been introduced forbidding people to spit on the floor of street cars. They have had some stables removed, and they are well known in Albany, and by the sanitary experts as having done very effective and valuable work.

We have had some women on the State Board of Charities. Mrs. Lowell, for one, has served on that Board admirably, and she has also served on the Board of Arbitration. She has been interested in tenement house reform, and in many things that have related to the health and welfare of the people.

* Read before the American Society of Superintendents of Training Schools for Nurses.

Women are now serving on executive committees of the Recreation League, a nurse among them. That has been formed with the hope of stimulating the public to seeing the need of out-door recreation for the people. Men and women were sent to the Board of Education, and succeeded in getting \$15,000 for their work, and this was largely given through the influence of a committee of women, who showed how reasonable it was to give these children a place for out-of-door recreation. Men and women were asked to be inspectors of the playgrounds, and among these was a nurse.

The People's Institute started in New York with a very lofty plan of stimulating responsibility in citizenship, and it has, perhaps, the largest local audiences in New York. It is interested in social improvements, social service, etc. Men and women are on the Executive Committee, and among them is a nurse.

The Women's Municipal League was entirely composed of women, and there were two nurses among them.

The Civic Club of Philadelphia has the credit throughout the country of having pushed women into offices of responsibility not on the spoils idea, but because they believe that where women are in such places, it will not be for selfish purposes, but for the good of all. They have effected reforms of a sanitary nature, have introduced travelling libraries, and have started vacation schools, which have now been taken over by the Board of Education.

In the West, more has been done by women in municipal affairs than elsewhere, and that is largely because there is a western hospitality to ideas, as well as other things, and the women have taken up the work in the right sort of way.

The Women's Club, of Chicago, is, perhaps, the most important club as a whole. It numbers 900 members, and has a very definite place in Chicago. Through its influence matrons have been placed in the police stations, the age of protection has been raised, and a great many reforms in county jails have been brought about. One woman in Chicago secured rubber tires for the ambulances of the city. She got one such ambulance at first, and it was such a success that they use them now in the entire system.

Vacation schools and playgrounds for children have been secured by women in different cities.

The Women's Alliance secured the appointment of five women as sanitary police for factory and tenement house inspection. One woman was engaged to collect data upon the proper collection and disposal of garbage, and proved so efficient that she was appointed inspector and superintendent of the night force, and proved the most

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)