

"For Home and Country"

Rural life at end of the 19th Century was not blessed with the amenities which are today taken for granted. Means of communication were vastly under-developed comparative to present standards. A farm constituted an economic unit that was, perforce, nearly self-sufficient, and the family it supported lived in semi-isolation, while the community, which it, with like units constituted was, in turn, isolated to a large degree from similar economic centres. With all the will in the world, and with all the potential intelligence which lay within it, the atmosphere generated within such an orbit was one by no means calculated either to stimulate ideas or to encourage their transmission. In contrast to the present day when life in the country offers all the advantages of urban existence except, perhaps the joys of a traffic jam or the conviviality of a crowded tram, rural existence of that era was circumscribed, and educational opportunity all too often consisted of a nodding acquaintance with the three R's. There were, of course, many notable exceptions, but the average was definitely low when measured by the potentialities of the present.

Yet a leaven was stirring within the social organism. The day of the pioneer was nearing its end and his work had been well done. He and his posterity had now opportunity to develop and enjoy the wealth which awaited their efforts within the vast expanse of an almost virgin land. Nor were they hesitant to put the effort to the test. At the same time, the dying years of the 19th century saw the birth of the technological revolution which was as radically to transform the condition of the average man in the 20th as had the Industrial Revolution of the 18th altered that of his forebears. Finally, there was revolt culminating in revolution on the distaff side of the house. Women, fretting at the chains in which custom had so long held them, were struggling to strike them off that they might assume heavier ones of their own devising. The dowager of fifty, though doubtless as reluctant to admit her years as any other of Eve's daughters, none the less considered herself as competent to vote as a callow boy of twenty-one. Time may yet prove her right.

In the ferment of these times, perhaps by coincidence, perhaps at the connivance of a fate not always malignant, the path of Erland Lee happened to cross that of Adelaide Hoodless. The former, a young farmer of Saltfleet Township, Wentworth County, was secretary, later president, of the Farmers' Institute. In the fall of 1896 while attending a meeting of the Experimental Union at Guelph, he listened to Mrs. Hoodless deliver a cogently argued address on the necessity of introducing Home Economic courses into the rural schools. Lee, whose impelling interest was the betterment of rural conditions, and whose recent thoughts had been following lines parallel to those expressed by Mrs. Hoodless, was impressed by both her logic and her fervour. He determined that she should speak before a gathering of the women of his township at the first opportunity.

Mrs. Hoodless had been introduced to her work by a personal tragedy. The death of her youngest son, the doctor had told her, was caused by drinking impure milk. Feeling that she was at least partially to blame, she determined to devote her efforts to the prevention of similar tragedies in other homes; and to win her fight decided that her best weapon was the dissemination of knowledge throughout rural communities.

When on the 19th of February, 1897, Mrs. Hoodless addressed a group of 101 women who, stimulated by the enthusiasm of Erland Lee and his wife, had gathered at Stoney Creek to hear her, so great was the interest she aroused that they organized under the presidency of Mrs. E. D. Smith of Winona and thus founded the Women's Institute of Saltfleet Township, the first of its kind in the world. As other groups sprang up throughout the Township and County, the name was changed to the one it bears today, Stoney Creek Women's Institute.

Most organizations are beset with difficulties during their formative period. Not so with the Women's Institute! The idea spread with all the swiftness of gossip and flourished in a manner to shame a green bay tree. Maintaining from its inception a close relationship with the Ontario Department of Agriculture, which today has a branch devoted solely to this rewarding work, the movement captured the imagination and affection of rural women throughout Ontario until the momentum of its growth swept aside first provincial, then national boundaries, and carried its example to many distant lands. Associations in other countries similar to the Federated Women's Institutes of Canada are now closely linked within the super-organization, The Associated Country Women of the World.

Shortly after its inception the F.W.I.O. adopted as its motto the phrase "For Home and Country". The soil from which the trunk and branches of a nation stem is formed of the homes that comprise it, and as a tree with roots embedded in barren soil will mature stunted and malformed, so will a nation if too many of its homes are encompassed in ignorance. The work of the Women's Institute, including as it does the whole range of human interests from the practical to the aesthetic, inculcating its membership, with particular emphasis on the juniors, with the ideal "sana mens in capore sano", is a potent force in the development of a sound national character.

Between the dates August 12-23 the Associated Country Women of the World will meet for the first time on Canadian soil. Women from the far corners of the earth will attend. Headquarters for the delegates will be the Royal York Hotel, Toronto. Most of the time will be devoted to the business of the Association, but on Sunday the 16th of August the delegation

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