

EDITORIAL

AN EDUCATIONAL ORGANIZATION—Over and over again we hear that the Women's Institute is "an educational organization." I wonder if we realize just how educational it is or can be.

Among the very obvious educational features, of course, we have the home economics education that comes by way of extension service, a sound vocational training for the job of homemaking. Along with this there is the very important education the members give one another in their papers and talks and demonstrations. Then there are the occasional guest speakers; if they are authorities in their fields they contribute a lot to the educational programme provided we don't have so many of them that they crowd out our home talent. The sessions of discussion that have recently come into popularity give us some education in thinking and expressing our thoughts in co-operation with others—not taking one side of an argument as we do in a debate, but setting our minds to work with other minds in a search for the truth or the right of a question—an important exercise for all of us since discussion is considered the basis of education for life in a democracy.

But there is another sort of education more subtle than these—the education that does something to make us what we are.

At a district annual this summer I heard the women vote money to buy prizes for sports day at a school in the district—a Reform School for boys. Also, representatives from the Institutes were going to attend the event. They didn't think of this as an educational experience but a woman could scarcely spend an afternoon watching these boys at their games without wondering what got them into a reform school and without wanting to do something to help them, even if heretofore she had been one of the unmoved thousands whose concern is only that bad boys be kept behind bars.

We hear of Institutes all over the province holding meetings and parties at the Country Home for old people. It hits rather hard to go into a room where everyone is old—old and helpless enough to need the care of an institution. Suppose our Institute goes farther and appoints us representative to visit the Home regularly. We talk with the old people, maybe write a letter or mend a dress for one who can't see. We find what the Institute can do to help them, but best of all we give them what they need most, a friend. Anyone who has served as visitor to old people in a Home or to friendless young people in a sanitarium, can never be quite the same again. It's a moving sort of education.

Perhaps your Institute is of the kind that brings into its circle not only the women from other countries who have moved into the neighborhood—that is comparatively easy—but the overlooked or rejected ones who have always lived in the community but have never had a place in it. As you get to know these women you learn that everywhere people are people and "the Colonel's lady and Judy O'Grady are sisters under the skin" . . . If your Institute has members of different races, different religions, so that you have a chance to actually live out the principles of knowing neither creed nor colour, then through your organization you have learned more about "human rights" than you would by sitting in at the United Nations for a long time.

Sometimes a situation will arise to threaten the safety or well-being of the community: a dangerous crossing on the highway, an unlighted street, the need of a school nurse, the threat of some influence in the community that would be adverse to the Institute's purpose of "raising the standard of the health and morals of the people." Then if you belong to an Institute that has learned how to move quietly and effectively in enlisting the help of public opinion, how to work with other like-minded groups, conferring with councils and other authorities, maybe thinking up a few original moves of its own, and if you have had a part in all this you will know that you have grown in stature as a responsible citizen.

A good Institute is always alert to local causes that need, not charity, but a friendly concern. When I have seen some of the needed, practical things Institutes have done and done in such happy ways, I have felt that I was not only learning the value of voluntary service—I was also getting a lesson in the social graces . . . A Women's Institute can be a very educational organization.

Ethel Chapman