



4th Annual Women's Institute Officers' Conference

THE PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Referring to the statement that history does not repeat itself, Mrs. Noblitt opened her presidential address by questioning this saying and continued to draw an analogy between the social and political situation in the years of the fourth century B.C. in the City State of Athens, and the selfish-disregard for the responsibilities of citizenship that seems to exist today.

Quoting the Conference theme, "When the freedom they most wished for was freedom from responsibility, then Athens ceased to be free and was never free again." The president sketched briefly the conditions in pre-Christian Athens that led to the Historian, Edith Hamilton, making the quoted statement.

"During the 4th century B.C. Athens was considered the representative of western civilization and the great despotic Persian Empire, the representative of the eastern world. With a tremendous army Persia attacked Greece and lost the battle. It was a miracle, a triumph of the spirit brought about by the conviction of the Athenians that their most precious possession was their freedom and their willingness to fight for that freedom even to death. After the victory, with the leadership of Pericles, a man of great vigour and liberality, the Athenians enjoyed a period of peace, tranquility and freedom of thought."

This idea of freedom, limited to the upper classes (slavery still existed) was unknown in other parts of the known world. Freedom was

born in Greece because men limited their own freedom. Self discipline was a way of life. They believed that limits were good.

Yet never had men had so much freedom. Never was freedom of speech less restricted nor the importance of the human being so respected. There was a continuing search for truth. In their art, they strove to express beauty and realism. They expressed spiritual perfection through free flowing lines. Never has their sculpture been surpassed. Never have buildings been more beautiful, nor literature so superior.

There was a willing obedience to written, as well as unwritten, laws. In fact, an even greater obedience to unwritten law because of their worship of what was right and good. They served their government gladly considering it their responsibility to do so since it was theirs and their protection against outside forces. Athenian art and form of government left an impact on civilizations that existed until centuries later.

Then came changes. During the war with Persia and for a century later the Greek City States, with Athens as leader, joined to resist a common foe, and for a time all went well. Gradually, the Athenians began to exercise their power and soon turned the other cities into unwilling subjects. The earliest political manifestation of this was a demand that Athenians be paid for public service. The early Athenians had never heard of such a thing.