

The WI's

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Poem specially written for us by C. Day Lewis to celebrate our Jubilee Year.

The Dream, 1915

Let countrywomen have their say
In the country's life. More things than raking hay,
Scolding the children, scalding the cream
Could use our hands and voices. To dispense
Womanly kindness and good sense
In wider spheres be our creative dream!

Is it right we should remain
Shadows and house-bound echoes of our men?
We are home-makers; but a home's
Made richer by the life that from outside
We bring it—bees go foraging wide
To gather sweetness for the honeycombs.

Lonely the life of womankind
In scattered farms and villages. We find
It hard to bloom in solitude.
But if we pool our needs and skills, our great
Yearning for closeness, and create
A meeting place, a happy sisterhood?

Let's make each village good and gay
As a ripe cottage garden, to display
Our loving care of heart and hand.
Let every countrywoman feel that she
Is a shareholder, a trustee
And guardian of this green and pleasant land.

The Growing

You should have seen this place, dear soul,
Fifty years ago! A dead-alive hole
Nothing but candles or paraffin lamps,
And damp enough to give you the cramps
(Yet I had to walk a hundred yards for drinking
water).

As the War grew longer and the food got shorter,
They roared to us countryfolk for more – though
when
It was over, like they'd chuck us on the midden
again.

'Homes for heroes'! Them as returned,
A raggedy cottage was all they had earned,
A cess-pool – the rural slum untouched –
And a boozer to forget what a government had
pledged.

It was a hard and narrow life
For all of us – maiden, spinster, wife.
No wonder we nagged. Well, the Institute taught us
To use our tongues for a seemlier purpose.
We nagged for piped water and electric light; we
nagged

For a school bus: we ran the authorities ragged
Till we got what we wanted. You take my meaning? –
The countryside needed a good spring-cleaning.
Oh, we've known our troubles. The old squire's
missus

Thought it was her job to rule and organise us:
Parson wanted the chapel folk kept out.